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Prankish pair. <Un petit menage> A fanta











## A PRANKISH PAIR





DAVENPORT \* \* GINISTY

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✓ A PRANKISH PAIR,

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[*Un Petit Ménage*]

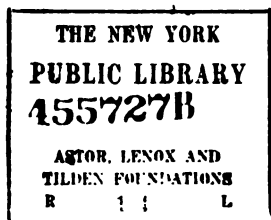
A Fantasy

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BY R. B. DAVENPORT.

\* Mr Sol Mendel Mar. 9, 1948

TO  
A WOMAN,  
ENIGMA OF ENIGMAS,  
THIS BOOK  
IS  
INSCRIBED.



## PREFACE.

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IF any excuse were needed for rendering this work into English, aside from its inherent interest, the morality of which may very likely be strenuously attacked, it is to be found in the fact that it is in motive, matter, and manner one of the curiosities of modern literature. Viewed from that stand-point, it would not be surprising if it were to be cited by many critics for a long time to come as a peculiar example of the French school of the present day, carrying the dominant tendency of a large class of current works of fiction to an extreme which has been rarely ventured upon before, and yet preserving all of the conventionalities, if not the exact proprieties, of a correct and unobjectionable style. For this very reason the rigorous censors of society may deem it the more deserving of anathema than if it were a work brutally conceived and shamelessly executed, like those that have given to Emile Zola his remarkable notoriety. Yet, I opine that when read calmly, coldly, deliberately, without the prurient desire to find between the lines what is obviously not in the lines themselves, a moral may be discovered at the end of the book; yes, long before its end is reached—a moral which the intelligent and candid reader will not be able to evade. With this explanation, I believe that the publication of “A Prankish Pair” requires no further justification.

R. B. D.

2d June, 1890.



# A PRANKISH PAIR.

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## I.



OWN in one corner of Brittany, the old priest stood erect before the young couple in the little church, scanning his phrases as he went, re-adjusting his spectacles on his nose, while he paused to take breath for a longer sentence :

*“ Chetiu er e laran d'ein me buman :  
en Eutru Done e regl tout er bed-  
men ; ean fur mastr baq bun tad.”* (“ This I say to myself :  
the good God regulates everything in the world. He is our  
master and our father.”)

Robert Brice leaned upon one of the arms of the old easy-chair, which would have rejoiced the heart of an antiquary, and which had been covered over, for this solemn occasion with a piece of red velvet. Little by little, very amorously, and with sly roguishness, he edged along to the ear of his wife, who was twisting a corner of her white veil between her fingers, to keep herself in countenance.

“ Marie-Ange,” he said, in a very low tone, “ will it be over soon ?”

She tried to suppress a pretty smile and hid her face in the gauze, which she pulled back over her forehead with a coquetish gesture.



"Will you be still?" she exclaimed, with a mischievous accent of rebuke. "It is very fine, what he is saying now."

"You understand it then?"

"No, but I am sure it must be nice. Come, you see we are attracting attention."

The venerable Monsieur Le Gallo, rector of the parish of the Isle of the Monks, had got fairly started. He strove unctuously to soften his voice, which had always remained harsh, as he set forth with simple eloquence the happiness of those couples who loved each other in the Lord; giving touching pictures of a fireside sanctified by prayer; offering, somewhat prematurely, grave advice on the education of children, who should be brought up in a most Christian manner, remote from the dangerous doctrines of the age; felicitating the husband and wife on their sentiments of piety and fidelity towards the church—*en illis ha Jesus-Chrouist*."

"Marie-Ange," continued Robert, just grazing her veil with his moustache, "you do not know the Palais-Royal Theatre? There is a certain Calvin there who reminds me astonishingly—"

"Robert!"

"What can you expect? Twenty minutes that Celtic harangue has lasted. Do you know that you are sweet enough to eat?—and I am hungry."

"Glutton!"

"Look here! I did not get married in order to fast!"

She was choking with laughter, yet much confused that she could not preserve a serious demeanor; and her eyes, as they met Robert's, conveyed a pardon at the same time that she reproved him. She thought her husband decidedly handsome, and very impudent, with his easy, Parisian polish, and his full dress, in the latest style, contrasting with the ridiculous garments of the spectators, made of coarse cloth and fashioned in the old style. A blush mounted to her cheeks as she sought to recall him to the proprieties; a blush that betrayed

an impatience to be alone with him, and to be able to listen freely to the foolish things which he had upon his lips. She would indeed have been vexed had he conducted himself gravely, with his head resting upon his hands, invoking the Almighty, as the solemnity of the place suggested. She felt something like a slight titillation of pleasure on seeing him so gay and so mocking; taking the ceremony so little in earnest, and without seeming to think at all of the austere features of marriage.



The ceremony was endless! The strange syllables, with their hoarse sound, ejaculated by the priest, followed one another incessantly, threatening never to cease. At first, everything had vastly amused Robert; the interior of this



little Breton church, with its low arches supporting a whole fleet of miniature vessels hung upon threads, completely rigged and painted in bright colors, attesting the vows accomplished by the mariners of the coast. Then there was a Virgin in a niche, whom the ladies of the local congregation had pretentiously clothed in the style of the Restoration, in antiquated silken stuff, with the waist away up under the arm; causing the plaster features to stand out in very odd relief. In the choir, an aged chanter, whose unbuttoned surplice was too small for him, had fallen asleep over his bassoon. And Robert instinctively recalled one

of those grand marriages at the Madeleine or Saint Philippe du Roule, where, to the thunders of the organ, the bridal couple, threading their way amid flowers, advanced up the carpeted steps on which the halberds of the beadles struck with a dulled resonance. And the whisperings, and the worldly bustle, and the gay toilets—could he be farther away from all this than in that little nameless chapel at the very end of the world, in the heart of Morbihan? \* It seemed so droll to him to be there ! He could not realize that he was there as an actor, on his own account, that it was to him that this allocution in Breton was addressed, and that it, and all this primitive and rustic pomp, really tied him fast.

“ *Groet peb-unan e zever, bag en ol’e vou eurus !* ”—  
 (“ Let each do his duty, and all will be happy ! ”)

One might suppose that this time it was the end. The rector took out his handkerchief, a handkerchief with blue and yellow spots, and spat in it at a distance. Then he folded it up again methodically, and launched forth into a new period.

“ Marie-Ange ? ”

“ Robert ? ”

“ Suppose we go now ? Hasn’t the blessing lasted long enough, eh ? ”

And he playfully made a gesture as if to rise. He had slipped his hand underneath Marie-Ange’s veil till it had found her own, and now he softly imprisoned it, while she as faintly resisted.

“ Let me hold it—so, with my two fingers, or I will make a fuss ! ”

He rattled on, almost unrestrainedly now ; only, in spite of his jests, preserving a sober face in presence of the priest, as became a man of breeding. And highly diverting were all these silly love-speeches which he uttered, scarcely moving his lips, while retaining apparently an air of deepest meditation.

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\* A department of France, in Brittany

He spoke of Paris, whither they were to take their flight that very evening, evoking an entire existence of fevered joys.

"It will be so jolly to teach you everything! to educate you in the Parisian ways. It will be delightful!"

The priest was getting out of breath. He raised his arms to heaven. He pointed to an ebony Christ above the altar, with its tragic wounds, which had recently been repainted with a touch of vermillion.

"And the open-air concerts! You have no idea of them! We shall dine on the terrace, at the Ambassadeurs—the music reaches us suddenly, by snatches—a clown is gesticulating on the stage in the distance—a bobbing of heads—plaudits—recalls—no one knows why—no one comprehends a word. It is absurd; and it is charming!"

"Speak lower, Robert, do speak lower. Come, pay a little attention!"

"In the spring, the races—you wear a new costume. You are seated there, on the grand stand, with a large card suspended from your button-hole. You must look as if you



knew it all. Horsemen in red coats pass at a gallop—there are encounters, salutations, oglings. You have never seen a red coat?”

“Robert!”

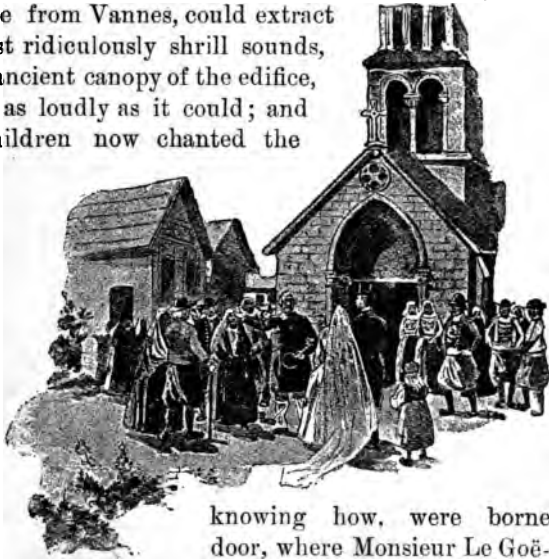
Enraptured, she pictured to herself these Parisian scenes, amidst which she was henceforth to live; passing suddenly from the convent at Vannes, asleep in its venerable placidity, to the freedom of a worldly existence. And this old-fashioned benediction had seemed piquant to her also, given as a sort of epilogue to a little romance of love that had been all too brief and too sweet, seeming almost like a thing not permissible. Doubtless, during the monotonous years in the old convent school, to which the sounds of life rarely came, unless they were softened and nearly extinguished, she had formed many projects; she had dreamed of the Unknown who would one day carry her from the country—for Paris is always a part of such dreams. But it had all come about so quickly! Why, only three months ago she was still saying her lessons in the class of seniors, wearing her blue ribbon scarf; and to-day the priest was talking to her of her duties as a wife! In the romances which she had read in secret, things rarely happened otherwise. And with a delicious little thrill, she felt a sort of dread of so much happiness. She was not sufficiently prepared for it, so to speak. It had seemed to her, with the vague remembrance of what she had read, that one could not marry the man one loved until after a thousand ordeals and adventures; and that it was essential that she should have suffered and wept, and have braved terrible obstacles. And with her, everything had come to pass so simply; without the shadow of a complication, with such irritating facility! Had she been suddenly snatched from this reality, which she half doubted, it seemed to her that she would have made but a feeble protest; as in the days when, at the hour of recreation, the exchange of some thrilling confidences was suddenly brought to a close by the sound of the bell, and she had re-

signedly resumed her tasks in the white-walled class-room, in one corner of which was the statue of the Virgin.

Suddenly the rector pronounced an "Amen!" He had been speaking such a long time, that, at first, neither Robert nor Marie-Ange looked up. It was only when they saw the bassoon awake with a start and blow abruptly into his instrument, that they knelt again for the close of the mass.

The poor little church organ, from which the organist, who had come from Vannes, could extract only the most ridiculously shrill sounds, beneath the ancient canopy of the edifice, pealed forth as loudly as it could; and the choir-children now chanted the music of the liturgy with their sharply attuned voices.

Then, suddenly, there was a great stirring of chairs. The bridal couple, scarcely towards the



knowing how, were borne door, where Monsieur Le Goëdic, Marie-Ange's father, in his sea-captain's uniform, which he had solemnly assumed, was already shaking hands with his guests, repeating with a cheery laugh:

"The breakfast is waiting, you know. Excitement makes one ravenous, doesn't it?"

Then, suddenly, espying a lad—

"Yves, go and see if his Reverence has taken off his surplice. Tell him that we shall not leave without him."

The child returned in an instant, followed by Monsieur Le

Gallo, who was tying his black silk cincture over his cassock and was out of breath.

The sacristy was too small; it was under the porch of the church that they had met, before the crowd of village urchins and old women in black widow's mantles, who were expectant of the usual bounties. A hubbub arose, as of folks in good humor, pricked on by sharp appetites. The air was so clear in the radiant autumn weather, in this corner of the Morbihan coast, that the voices assumed a strange sonorousness and had notes in them like those of the tempest.

Le Goëdic, after an instant, embracing his whole company at one glance, appeared playfully to count his guests, to see that no one had escaped, and with his ancient tone of command, as when he gave his orders through the speaking-trumpet, exclaimed:

"Have we cleared anchor? Off we go, then! Robert, my boy, give your wife your arm!"





## II.

E GOËDIC'S house was situated on an extremity of the little island called "The Point." Here was the principal harbor,—a miniature harbor, poorly sheltered,—and he had chosen this spot that he might, from his windows, view the taper-

ing masts of some schooner riding at anchor, and with this stimulative and suggestive picture before him, dream, while smoking his pipe, of the regretted voyages of his sailor career.

He was born on this island ; he loved it because it had remained Breton and was ignored of tourists. And what, indeed, should bring them to this lone rock in the midst of the gulf, where, unless you could lay claim to an acquaintance with some one, you could not be sure of a bed ; where there is neither carriage nor horse, and which is guarded, besides, by a sea that is but rarely accommodating ? In the course of his voyages, while sailing his vessel on his own account, the captain had returned thither as often as possible, gradually working a transformation at each one of these sojourns, in an old rookery that stood upon a huge mass of granite, ornamenting it from time to time with rare curios brought from every clime ; planting trees in the rocky ground in order to shade it, and sowing seeds in soil which he had brought from distant lands ; for, like all sailors, he had a passion for flowers. Each time that he returned, arriving in the ferryman's barge from the Cape of Arradon, he was warmly welcomed.

"Well, Barnabé," some of the old folks would ask, "are you going to stay this time ?"



But Barnabé Le Goëdic would shake his head, strike his breast gaily with his fist, and reply: "The locker is yet sound. Besides, you see, the little one must have her dower!"

First, he would make the round of the island, followed everywhere by an escort of women, who would tell him the news; for the men—they were all sailors—were rare in the

country. He went and gladdened his eyes with the accustomed sights. He mounted upon the dolmen, covered with its coating of thick moss, whence he could perceive in the distance the "great main," the enticing ocean, and from which point he embraced the entire gulf; the Isle of Ars, with its pointed belfry, on the right; Gavrinis, marking the gaping mouth of its mysterious grotto, on the left. Then, with a deep respiration, he would

say: "It is well!" And while asking his questions, distributing pennies to the urchins, and quietly handing little sums to certain of the women who, as he saw, had donned the widow's cap, he would again descend towards the Point, inspecting the buildings, informing himself of work done in his absence, and settling down finally for a few days in his own home. Soon afterward, Mous. Le Gallo would arrive,



saluting Le Goëdic with a jest, which was ever the same: "Well, when are we to be mayor?" and at table, during their chat, stating the needs of the commune, and the events that had happened connected with it.

Yes, he certainly thought of his final debarkation, one of these days, at this chosen spot, without, alas! the poor "departed," as he quaintly said in speaking of his wife, who had died a year after the birth of her daughter; but yet with the little one, his Marie-Ange, recalling to him more and more, as she grew up, the dear vanished soul. Sometimes for twenty-four hours he would realize his dream. He would go to the convent at Vannes to fetch Marie-Ange and instal her in his home, delighting in total forgetfulness; leaving his letters unopened; lounging with her about the harbor, watching the boats at anchor just as if he did not command one himself, imagining himself a retired old sea-dog. And it was great amusement, at such times, for Marie-Ange to take charge of the household; to order and command; to institute, with her delicate instincts, a hundred little reforms in a moment; to play the housekeeper, and to deck out and modernize the old drawing-room.

In those days she would leave off her convent uniform, and would delight to prink herself out, taking revenge for her hours of irksomeness, decking herself with the exotic costumes which her father had accumulated in old chests, mementos of his adventurous wanderings. And these disguises became a passion with her. Now she diverted herself by imitating a pretty Japanese doll, with three silken "kimono," one placed upon another, and a brilliant sash—the "obi"—forming at the back an immense knot, while she twisted up her beautiful chestnut locks and twined them with threads of silver and



gold; or again, a Hindu Bayadere, veiled with fine gilded tissues, lightly spangled, her forehead touched with black crayon to give it the effect of tattooing.

And good Captain Le Goëdic smiled beatifically in admiration of his daughter, deeming her most beautiful, and needing all his stoicism to prevent him from taking her with him aboard his ship as its miniature queen.

"Ah! little one," said he, in his big, kind, tender voice, "it is tiresome at the convent, isn't it?"

"Ah, yes, papa!"

Then he would take her upon his knees, as when she was yet but a wee thing, and very gently, as if he were excusing himself, he would explain to her how it was that he was again obliged to go away and to leave her in the stupid old nunnery at Vannes. Oh! not for very long, now! And then he was going to bring back to her such beautiful things, odd jewels, rare stuffs! At length, by and by, she would be free, and happier than anyone else. She should see! He would have it at heart to compensate her for all these gloomy days. *He* would not be the one to cross her in anything! Meanwhile, he would go back to the Indian or China seas to swell his "magot," and he never failed to make a pun on the different meanings of this word:

"Yes—a great magot—in China! Egad!"

Then she should marry as she liked. Assuredly, were she to espouse a sailor like himself, he would not be vexed! A sailor, first of all, was certain to be a good fellow. But all the same, he would not raise any obstacle to the choice which she might make. Oh! certainly not; after having left her alone so long, he would not take it into his head now to risk ag-grieving his little Marie-Ange in anything!

And he began his preparations for a fresh cruise. Old mariners, familiar companions, sought him out and signed with him, declared that they would not sail under other orders than his; and Marie-Ange, surfeited with all that there

is of the picturesque in persons and things pertaining to the sea, saw the tanned faces—good, simple faces, bronzed by every sun and every tempest—defile before her at the Point. Glasses were brought forth and there was talk; and she heard the names of strange countries recalled, as naturally as if they were only talking of Auray or of Hennebon.

Then broad hands were clasped, meetings were appointed; the sturdy fellows went their way, attended by *Le Goëdic* as far as the roughly cloven rocks, where the ferryman's boat was sheltered.

Some days later, *Marie-Ange* would accompany her father to the *L'Orient*. The schooner which the captain commanded was swinging at anchor in the roadstead. A barge took *Marie-Ange* out to the vessel. She spent the last day on board with him. The moment came to say good-bye. His eyes were a little moist, though he affected to smile. *Le Goëdic* kissed his daughter furiously, and with his big, kind, gruff voice, which trembled a little, he cried :

“Come, little one, time's up !”

The barge brought her back to the land; she followed the schooner with her eyes as long as she could, while it sped towards the horizon, and an old female relative then took her back to the convent at Vannes.

Then, with a weary sigh, she resumed her ordinary round of life. But she looked at herself in her little glass in her bedroom and saw that she was pretty; and she consoled herself with the thought that some day this tedious existence would come to an end. Who knows? Perhaps the next time her father returned.



Yes, she was pretty. Her face was delicate, of a complexion not pale, yet only slightly tinted, as if the robust health which had descended to her from the sea-faring race from which she had sprung was so coquettish as only to manifest itself demurely. Her mouth, for instance, bespoke this healthfulness, with a little sensuality about the very red lips. She had gray eyes, like the true Breton maid that she was, eyes in which there was ever a certain mystery and enigma; but they were wide open, and they had a perturbing loveliness. Something like the perfume of a wild flower pervaded her whole being, refined though it was by her education, and on her sweet visage there was a piquant air of decision, which became her ravishingly.

She had keen attacks of impatience and curiosity. Although she had a good deal of liberty during her absences from the convent, she yet knew nothing of the world. And a great longing for travel, for tumult, for activity haunted her, while, during the hours of recreation, she was promenading in the vast gardens of the great religious establishment, which seemed separated by its lofty gray walls from the exterior life.

Besides, eighteen years of age as she was, she was no longer treated as a mere school-girl. She was no longer obliged to study, for she had already been through the course. She disposed of her time almost as she liked, having—except for moments which were consecrated to what the programme of studies styled “social accomplishments”—to bear a heavy and wearisome burden of idleness. Ah! those “accomplishments” at the convent of Vannes! A very ancient gentlewoman, with a little thin voice which resembled the sound of a worn-out bird-organ, taught singing, and, her respiration being weak, she used now and then to stop short in order to take breath. Her repertory was composed wholly of the old-time music, such as had been cherished by Marie Antoinette; and, in order that modesty might not be offended, she used

to paste little narrow slips of paper over the words which were engraved beneath the staves, wherever they spoke of love or seemed to her to express a too glowing sentiment. These mysterious bands of paper strangely tantalized Marie-Ange.

Were she given Dalayrac's "Renaud d'Ast," with the air of Céphise to sing, she began the poem in this way:

"Be the object of . . . . .  
But absent, not cold . . . . ."

The words "love's gentle fire," and "to desire," had alarmed the good lady. A slip of paper covered them over and this is how the ancient lines were sung:

"And the ills I have borne to this day,  
La—la—la, will tenderly pay ! \*

The professor of drawing was an ecclesiastic of the diocese, to whom the bishop had confided the duty of presenting to his pupils only the most austere models, and who, using the pencil himself with but very little assurance, excelled only in sketching the aureoles with which the heads of the much-clothed saints, which he caused to be copied, were crowned. It was he who, in order "to break the pupil's hand in," as he said, had originated a system which consisted solely in designing crosses, first plain, then denticulated, then ornamented with puerile efflorescences. And thus, eternally, year by year, crosses succeeded crosses.

And poor Marie-Ange listened resignedly and very reluctantly to these lessons of her simple instructors, the days seeming endless in the society of the nuns, whom she sometimes startled very innocently by her queries about life; deprived of the resource of frank communion with com-

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\* "Be the object of love's gentle fire  
But absent, not cold to desire,  
And the ills I have borne to this day  
Love's forfeit will tenderly pay ! "

panions of her age, being now too big a girl among these very little girls.

She had some privileges which were envied her. Her father's letters, covered with queer stamps, reached her, by special favor, without being opened, contrary to the rules of the establishment; and they were her only real diversion. Aided by the recollection of certain bits of travel, she pictured the captain debarking in extraordinary countries, being served by yellow women or black, entering opium-smoking dens, meeting with adventures, living a life of continual surprises. Ah! the surprises! To quit the narrow circle of this uniform existence! When she folded up her letters again, sole echoes from the outer world which reached her in the silence of the convent, she felt a "nostalgia of the unknown." She would then take down her little calendar and count the days that lay between her and the freedom which she would regain upon the return of Le Goëdic.

At the convent, the lady superior had at first sounded her as to a religious vocation; but she must have recognized very soon that there was too much impetuosity in Marie-Ange's nature for her ever to conform herself to the observance of a rule. Brought up very Christianly, submissive to all the pious exercises that were imposed upon her, her fervor was yet only lukewarm. Spiritual consolations were not sufficient to endow her with patience. If she had patience, it was only in the hope of an early change in her destiny. Then, in her imagination, there was a great deal of movement about her; yes, a great deal of noise and movement; for, in her ignorance of everything, she could be explicit in nothing. She knew only that her caprices, whatever they might be, would be rarely denied; and she promised herself that she would employ the privileges granted her by the affectionate indulgence of her father, to her advantage. At those times, when she plunged into dreams of an existence that should be broadly dispensed, she pitied—oh, so very much!—the poor little ones who had been

destined since their babyhood to the religious vocation; who would never quit this forbidding establishment, or else some other that was like it; and who wore already on their guileless faces the pallor which befits the nun's cap and the sombre veil.

Finally, one morning, a letter came to her which caused her to utter a cry of joy. Le Goëdic had finished his cruise; he was returning to France, and this time, his operations having been successful, he renounced the sea-faring life. The decision which he had arrived at had cost him a great deal of heart-burning; but zounds! he wished to enjoy at last the happiness of being a father in earnest, and for good and all. He would arrive at Vannes in one month. He would take Marie-Ange away with him; she would bid a final adieu to the convent: "Eh, little girl, let's be happy, both of us. First of all, you know, I would do anything in the world for you."

The worthy captain so well arranged his affairs that he kept his appointment exactly. One fine day he arrived at the convent, having a few hours before surrendered his good old craft into the hands of its owners, and bringing with him on top of the carriage all his luggage, everything that had belonged to him in the beloved ship in which he had sailed to the four corners of the earth.

Marie-Ange threw herself upon his neck. She took leave of the nuns in somewhat brief fashion, and, beside herself with joy, she seated herself in the carriage with her father.

"Ah! papa," said she, "I am so glad!"

And half intoxicated with this freedom, so long desired, she breathed with delight the pure atmosphere of the radiant spring day. Ah! she was herself at last. And question after question, concerning the captain's voyage, followed each other on her lips, without waiting to listen to the responses; she mixed them up with projects for the future, with wishes, with requests.



"Good Heavens ! my little Marie-Ange, how pretty you have become !"

"O papa!" answered the young girl, archly, "that's not gallant! You did not think me so before, then?"

She kissed him. It was charming prattle, foolish chatter, without coherence, all exclamations and interrogations.

"You shall see," cried Marie-Ange, laughing, "how I will make you forget your old Chinese. Ah! but you must become accustomed to an odd sort of life, out there."

And as the captain protested, she placed her hand over his mouth.

"Yes, you mariners, you have the airs of Saint Touch-Me-Not, when you come home ; but we know very well how you have carried on in your distant Orient!"

And this merry babble she kept up as far as the Cape of Arradon, where the road comes to an end in front of the gaping sea. The carriage stopped among the rocks, and with his handkerchief Le Goëdic signalled to the ferryman on the other side to hasten with his biggest craft so as to carry over at once all of the baggage which had now been taken from the venerable hackney-coach.

"Ah! ah!" said the captain, winking as he pointed to it, "there are some surprises here for you."



### III.

APTAIN LE GOËDIC and Marie-Ange were debarking at the Isle of Monks, when the old servant at the Point, after the usual embraces, suddenly struck her forehead with her hand and exclaimed:

“O Lord! I forgot!”

From her corsage, which was bordered with coarse velvet, she

drew a visiting card.

“A young man, a handsome young man, too, came just now to see you, captain.”

“Me?”

“Yes—oh, not a sailor, you may be sure! It’s my opinion he’s a Parisian.”

“A Parisian!” said Marie-Ange, her curiosity awakened, as if the word had exercised a strange effect upon her.

“He said, being in Brittany, he wanted to shake hands with you—by right of cousinship. But where in the world could you have got such a cousin as that? I told him that you would return to-day, and I asked him to take a walk as far as the dolmen, since it always interests strangers so. A nice time for him to come—to-day!”

Le Goëdic, much occupied, listened but inattentively to the servant, while he superintended the loading of his packages on an ox-cart.

“Hey, there! A little more gently, please. It’s porcelain, that is. Come, a tug at this one, now; it’s the heaviest.”

But Marie-Ange, greatly puzzled, had taken the card from-

the hands of Pasq, the old servant, who, in turn, much excited, scolded the porters, and recited in Breton such news as she fancied would interest her master.

"The ground is dry—we are in need of rain."—" *Ur banig glau e brebe vad.*"

The young girl turned the piece of bristol-board over and over again in her fingers.

"Robert Brice? A cousin? How is it that I have never heard of him?"

The little caravan, surrounded on all sides by a throng of women and children, set out along the scarcely visible roadway of the island, against which Le Goëdic exclaimed furiously, fearing the effect of the jolts upon the fragile objects that he had brought back with him.

A young man, elegantly dressed in a travelling suit of light gray, his shapely shoes partly covered with yellow gaiters, was walking up and down in front of the house. He was a hand-



some fellow of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. A reddish-blond beard, cut to a point, framed a somewhat pale visage. He smoked a cigarette in an amber tip, while measuring his hundred paces. A single glass fixed in one of his eyes attracted the dazed attention of the urchins. He wore a soft hat of a brownish shade, in the band of which glistened a small peacock's feather. A small Russian leather bag was suspended by a shoulder-belt at his back. One corner of a blue striped handkerchief protruded from a pocket of his jacket.

Apparently heedless of the curiosity which he excited, he gazed at the sea with a sort of wearied indifference; and he seemed, in fact, to have become a considerable time before quite inaccessible to emotions caused by natural objects.

Marie-Ange was the first to perceive him.

"Is that he?" she asked of the servant, with a strange feeling of surprise.

On hearing their steps, the traveller had turned. He guessed who Le Goëdic was, no doubt, by his pilot-coat with gilt buttons, and he approached him with a salutation. But at the captain's side, he suddenly distinguished the young girl, and even he could not repress a little gesture of astonishment. He held his hat in his hand and bowed with respectful ease.

"By Jove, captain, I am confounded! It was a poor inspiration on my part, as I see, to present myself here to-day. I have at least had an opportunity to verify the fact that you are, indeed, as I have been told, the real sovereign of the isle; and the much-loved sovereign, too, as is proven by the retinue which surrounds you."

All this was neatly said, with a grace which perhaps betrayed the least bit of intentional condescension, the indulgence of the Parisian who effects to place himself on a level with his somewhat rustic hosts.

"But do not let me disturb you, I beg, in the midst of the first cares incident to your arrival. I came at hazard, and I only desired to shake you by the hand and to present my regards, those of a cousin who wishes to be acquainted with a relative of whom he has heard too much that is good for this desire not to be natural."

Le Goëdic, somewhat abashed by these courteous words, chivalrously spoken, looked with some embarrassment at the young man, stammering out vague thanks meanwhile, and letting fall some of the packages which he was carrying; standing also with his head uncovered, his gold-laced cap in his hand.

Robert Brice mentioned his own name, and briefly recalled the ties by which he was connected with Le Goëdic; but the captain would not allow him to finish.

"You are the nephew of my dear Aunt Bridget!"

“And it was she who used often to talk to me of you, captain, and with a fine enthusiasm; for she has not forgotten you, though she has lived for twenty-five years in Paris.”

“But, my eyes! Here I have been standing on ceremony with you! Just see what it is to live two hundred leagues apart! Our hearts are warm towards each other—but we are unacquainted.”

And thereupon he cordially held out his hand to Robert. The remembrance of the family connection returned to him after long years of separation. She whom he called Aunt Bridget, an old maid now, had been the great companion of his infancy, and he suddenly saw her once more, with the Breton head-dress which the “damsels” in his time still wore. Then, travel, emigration, the accidents of life had dispersed the numerous tribe of the Le Goëdics. Marriage had brought new names into it, communication between the different branches had become more rare, and had at last almost ceased. Always at sea, the captain had naturally almost forgotten some of the births that had occurred at a distance; and with the exception of Bridget, who had ever remained dear to him, he had no longer an exact knowledge of the relatives who had for years been established in Paris, and who had pursued a different path from his own. Nevertheless, as a man whose heart was open enough to admit many affections, he would have asked nothing better than to bestow a large portion of tenderness upon those unknown cousins.

At present he suddenly recalled those whom he had lost sight of for a long period. Oh, yes, he had been present at the marriage of Robert's mother at Nantes, when she wedded a ship-owner, who had afterward launched out at Paris into great industrial enterprises. Bridget had reared up this young wife, left an orphan at an early age, as if she had been her mother, and had shared her subsequent destinies with her.

Then death had reaped all around her, and at the age of sixty years, she had been called upon to expend her maternal

tenderness anew for Robert, who had been deprived of those nearest him ; not without a certain dread of the responsibility of guiding him in life, the great boy who, while gratefully repaying all the devotion that he owed her, asked only to be emancipated from her guardianship. A few rare letters from Bridget in the past—he was now conscious of the fact—had informed the captain of these events.

Marie-Ange, slightly agitated, had remained a little behind her father.

“Ah ! bless me !” exclaimed Robert, smiling, after the special salutation he had addressed to her, “I bear a grudge against Aunt Bridget for not having informed me that I should find another charming cousin here.”

Marie-Ange felt her cheeks redden. It was the first real compliment that she had ever received ; and coming from this polished Parisian, it gave her a genuine thrill of delight.

“I say !” said Le Goëdic, “we are not going to remain here on this door-step. My dear cousin, I notify you that you are a prisoner on the island, and that in virtue of my power as sovereign, which you accord me, I shall prohibit the ferryman from taking you back to the mainland.”

“But, captain, this is an intrusion ! Had I known that you were only just returning from the sea, I should certainly not have permitted myself—”

“Oh ! let us drop fine phrases, shall we not ? I’m a simple sort of fellow and a stranger to them. I swear that I am glad to see you ; that is the long and short of it ! We dine at two o’clock. I have some orders to give and must ask you to excuse me ; but Marie-Ange, here, will keep you company.”

Captivated by this friendly welcome, Robert entered the house. He scarcely dissimulated a surprise upon finding himself in an almost coquettish drawing-room, filled with rare knick-knacks, and hung with curious, changeful stuffs, the arrangement of which had certainly been directed by a feminine hand.

Advised by his physicians to seek a purer atmosphere, in order to repair the ravages of a winter too gaily spent, Robert, with the indolence of the tourist, had merely proposed to himself a picturesque excursion. He had recalled the stories, told by Aunt Bridget, about the Isle of the Monks, a sort of fief of the Le Goëdics ; and he had thought that he could brighten his exile with the spectacle of this little primitive kingdom, guarded by the sea against all invasion of modernism. But here, instead of a simple habitation, he found himself in a really civilized interior, in the presence of a mariner who was in no sense ridiculous, and of a young girl who was positively delightful.

Marie-Ange, being left alone with him, divined his thoughts.

"Be frank, Monsieur," she said, gaily; "you feared you were coming among savages."

Robert laughed.

"Good gracious, Mademoiselle! we Parisians are a most ignorant set, and I should be silly to conceal the fact from you that I am delighted to have been a little disappointed; you see, since you have appealed to my candor, that I answer in the vein that you desire. My punishment is in having so tardily made the acquaintance of relatives who greet me with such gracious cordiality, and in not having earlier met the just reproach that is addressed to me."

There was a brief silence between them. The two young folks gazed at each other curiously, and the situation seemed so agreeable to them that they gaily threw off their reserve.

"This is a piquant first meeting between cousins, isn't it?" said Robert. "But judge if the ties of blood are to be ridiculed! I had the honor of being presented to you only a few minutes ago, yet I assure you in all sincerity that I should be most happy to gain your liking. Are you willing, Mademoiselle, by virtue of relationship, that we should cease at once to be strangers?"

Marie-Ange, through a remnant of instinctive distrust, had

expected some commonplace phrases ; and here was Robert expressing himself with amiable simplicity, and with a sort of kindly good-will that was full of grace. Upon his side, he had discovered her to be enticing, prettily affable, and with a loveliness which he had at once qualified to himself, by way of expert opinion, as original.

Marie-Ange held out to him a little hand, very white and very shapely, which he could not help looking at.

"Let us be true cousins," said she.

"Thank you," said Robert. "You have a devoted friend in me from this day, I swear it !"

Then their questions flew back and forth without constraint. She told Robert that she had left the convent that very morning, and Robert, gliding discreetly over the reasons which had caused him to seek a renewal of his strength in Brittany, recounted to her what he was—"good for anything," said he, laughingly, "not good for very much, with my diploma in my pocket; just something of a lawyer, so as to have an occupation;" without great ambition, for that matter, having, perhaps, some artistic taste, which led him, when he pleaded at the Palace, to work himself up to a high pitch in advocacy of chimerical and impossible cases that were lost in advance; but at least, they diverted him. He had also the specialty, at the Petty Assizes, of cases of conjugal infidelity—

He stopped short, somewhat confused, rallied himself wittily, dazzling the young girl with pictures of Parisian life, barely outlined, which he marshalled one after another, without affectation, in his conversation, leaving her with an impression of terror, at which she laughed.

"Such is my biography, Mademoiselle," he added. "They say I am not serious; but everything depends upon knowing what there is that really *is* serious, and what there is that is most worth caring for. Anyhow, I affirm that I am an honest fellow, who still finds the world to be a thing that is infinitely curious. And you, cousin?"



"Oh, I? I am not acquainted with the world; but," she continued, with a pretty pout, "I am not lacking in curiosity."

She thought, at times, that she was dreaming. In so few hours everything that she heard was so different from the austere melancholy of the convent.

Behind this fitful chat, there was for the young girl the romantic summoning up of a fantastic train of turbulent scenes, exuberant in noise and movement. And it was so strange to think of them; to feel their intoxicating influence in the face of the solemn ocean, with its almost tragic aspect, visible through the open windows.

"Ah, Paris!" sighed Marie-Ange, with her eyes aflame, a flush of animation on her cheeks.

Captain Le Goëdic entered. He had made a semblance of a toilet, out of courtesy to his guest. He excused himself, and assured him that dinner was at hand.

"And here," he exclaimed, suddenly, "I have not as yet so much as shown you to your room!"

"How, my room!"

"It would be a fine thing, wouldn't it, for you to quit us thus: you shall stay—shall he not, Marie-Ange? We have to make up for a great deal of lost time!" And as Robert, much surprised and truly charmed with this hearty simplicity, resisted, he added, "Ah, I see what it is: you are afraid of finding it too stupid here for you. You fear to be like Robinson Crusoe on his island."

Robert, sincerely protesting his desire, on the contrary, to establish the closest relations with his cousins, was compelled to promise that he would return in a day or two and instal himself at the Point. And, indeed, those glorious landscapes, of which he had grown somewhat weary, without his being able to explain the cause of the reaction, suddenly became singularly attractive again. How could he have so calumniated the sea, and have applied to it, one day when he felt the

"nostalgia of the boulevard," the disrespectful epithet, "an old prude"? Never had it appeared to him more grandly beautiful, more imposing, more caressing.

The dinner was delightful, and Robert found a singular charm in this situation of the prodigal son, on whose account they were making merry. Not a word of common-place was spoken. They sounded each other with friendly curiosity and question met question, in the confusion of the ideas, awakened, perchance, by topics which were novel either to one or another of them.

On both sides they had lived amid such different surroundings: the rough life on board ship on long cruises, the slow succession of the days at the convent, the high fever of the Parisian existence: these three elements, so unlike one another, were mixed up together, confused and brought into collision, in this frank and altogether unexpected converse.

A carriage awaited Robert at Arradon, the village where you alight to cross the little arm of the sea. He saw it in the distance, as big as a child's toy, the coachman wearing the broad Breton hat. Possessed by a species of mild beatitude, he regretted that the coach had been exact to the hour, and that he was forced to leave so soon, even with the assured prospect of coming again.

He arose with a little effort and grasped the hands that were held out to him.

"I go with my heart full of your welcome, captain," he said, addressing Le Goëdic; but his eyes at that moment managed to encounter those of Marie-Ange, and she blushed.

"And when shall we see each other again?"



"Why, the day after to-morrow, if my haste will not appear to you an intrusion."

"And is that a real promise?" asked Marie-Ange, archly.

"On my word, cousin," responded Robert, bowing; "I should be my own worst enemy were I not to keep it."

They accompanied him to the boat. The clear twilight fell on the tranquil sea, roseate with the warm sunset glow. He sprang into the boat and flung a last salute to his hosts, who watched him from the beach, growing fainter and fainter, until he became merely a point in space. Robert, for his part, did not remove his eyes from the little group formed by the captain and the young girl. The sun had disappeared, but with its latest rays it made a sort of aureole around the form of Marie-Ange, in her bright costume; and it was like a fairy vision, the white profile against the flaming red of the horizon.

"If I return!" thought he. "If I return? Of course I shall. By Heaven!" he added, a smile just outlined about his lips; "were only the captain to be there, I might, perhaps, have hesitated. But Marie-Ange—what a sweet name! It is delicious to have a cousin who is called Marie-Ange."

And while the carriage was taking him back to Vannes, he reviewed the incidents of the day: first his surprise, then the species of charm to which he had gradually succumbed, the queer emotion that had taken possession of him in the calm of the domain of the Point, the curiosity which urged him to see again the young girl in whom he had a presentiment of a "temperament," beneath her pretty school-girl awkwardness.

Being fatigued, he was half in a doze when the carriage stopped at Vannes, in front of his hotel.

"Oh!" said he, to himself, laughing, while passing his hand over his eyes, which he could hardly open, "I was dreaming of Marie-Ange!"

#### IV.



**T** was three weeks since Robert had installed himself at the Point, and he did not in the least think of going away.

He had not been tempted to quit the Island for a single day. He had tranquilly forgotten Paris. If, in the evening, he ran through the newspapers that had just arrived, the echoes of the gay world seemed prodigiously indifferent to him. The familiar names of the gay fellows with whom he had been wont

to mix, no longer had any meaning for him; it was merely like an old song, the refrain of which murmured in his ears. What affair was it of his, that Martha, "the Chicken," had had a clawing match with Ida Planchon, alias Jeanne de Serpigny, in a tavern? And the duel of big S—with that scalawag, Montero! He was astounded that he could once have been interested in all this twaddle.

His existence had become established upon a footing of intimate good-fellowship with Marie-Ange. Ceremony had been of short duration between them; it had been banished at once as ridiculous in this out-of-the-way, half-savage region. But Robert remarked, at the same time, that the young girl was becoming more polished, day by day, losing, by contact with him, something of her provincialism.

Very oddly, with an arch grace, a curious tact, and marvellous adaptability, she appropriated to herself certain of his

mannerisms and imparted to them a subtle femininity. She did it in an unconscious fashion, without any perceptible effort, as if by an instinctive absorption. But this education manifested itself, to the delight of Robert, in I know not how many ways—in a detail of dress, in a witty response, in a slight trait of audacious coquetry. And he bestowed eulogies upon her, never seriously, but always with a persistent touch of scepticism blending with his gallantry.

“Really, Marie-Ange, you are becoming too Parisian for me. Remember, I am nothing now but an honest countryman.”

And they laughed with such youthful heartiness, that they were diverted by their own laughter, it had so frank a ring in it, whether they were chatting in a corner of the parlor, while Captain Le Goëdic was copying his ship’s journal in a fine round hand for his amusement, or whether they went off together across the island, which they had quickly overrun, to the dolmen which crowns it on the side of the “great main,” as they say down there, the side where the groups of rocks, white points in the midst of the blue, no longer protect it against the immensity of the ocean.

And it was there, in this primitive desert, suggesting a past of fearful grandeur, of sacrifices, of human slaughter, that Marie-Ange, seated in the shade of those ferocious boulders, amused herself by questioning her cousin about the great world of which she knew nothing; and, without his being well aware of it, imbibed his lessons, the results of which, nevertheless, he was destined to note.

Robert had agreeable ways of saying all that there was to say, without uttering anything that could alarm her modesty. And the very innocence of these jests was delightful to him—to him, **who** had tasted almost of satiety.

They remained there for hours, in view of the waves, lulled by their music; chatting of a thousand follies which might have astounded the echoes of that nook, so solemn in its

grandeur, and have disconcerted them with converse so profane.

But no temptation came to Robert in this species of beatific existence, and in the joyous liberty of this friendly and novel intercourse. He gladdened his eyes and his heart with her girlish charms without other thought.

As if he were thinking aloud, he said to her once:

"You know, Marie-Ange, it is charming for us to be alone like this; but, then—it isn't dangerous enough."

She blushed a little, and threatened him with her uplifted finger, coquettishly.

"Just wait a minute," said she.

Then she ran like a child before him to a little knoll, whence she bade him defiance. And, flushed with the effort, in the broad light which she could boldly defy, she planted herself with her hands akimbo, in an instinctively felicitous attitude, her form exquisitely moulded beneath the blue foulard that she wore. And so ingenuous was this saucy movement, that he could not find an immodest suggestion in it.

"Oh!" exclaimed Robert, "if you dazzle me like that, it's no play!"

They returned, at the approach of evening, which enveloped the isle in rosy mists, and amused themselves by narrating to Le Goëdic, who was at first amazed, all sorts of unheard-of adventures, as if they had returned from a real voyage. The worthy man, accustomed by his adventurous life to believe even the chimerical to be possible, lifted his hands to heaven and interrupted their recitals with wondering exclamations—"You don't say so!" and they had finally to rally him on his credulity in order to undeceive him. Marie-Ange kissed him.

"You know, papa," said she, "it was Robert's idea, not mine. You must scold *him*!"

Le Goëdic had never felt himself happier than in the midst of this jocundity; and the old servant, Pasq, allowed herself,

too, to be fascinated by the charm of the gaiety which filled the whole house.

"He has a honeyed tongue, that Monsieur Robert," she murmured, while serving her buckwheat cakes, which always won for her enthusiastic compliments.

At dinner, there were little plots between Marie-Ange and Robert; surprises which they arranged for the startled captain, and which were pretexts for prolonging the evening; little old-fashioned games, revived by fantasies of which Le Goëdic comprehended nothing. But he lent himself obediently, nevertheless, to the parts they assigned to him.

And it was here that Robert displayed real genius in his efforts to make them remain up late; winning a wager whenever midnight passed before they had retired, and finding a thousand devices in his fertile Parisian brain to detain them longer in the parlor, which, despite the closed blinds, was filled with the tumult of the rising sea and of the breaking waves, driven by the fresh wind upon the neighboring rocks.

"Captain," he would cry, at the moment when they separated, "you will have to send me away!"

"It's a bore to him, poor fellow," pouted Marie-Ange, disapprovingly. "He mourns his lost freedom."

Then she would parody the ballads of the style of 1830, which she had learned in the singing course at the convent, dealing with the unfortunate captives of the infidels, sighing for their country; crusaders with ridiculous names, prisoners of an emir, cursing their chains and confiding astonishing missions to passing swallows.

But, despite these mild protestations, Robert would have been much vexed if they had not shown some little regret when he made a pretense of departure.

Almost insensibly, he accustomed himself to this idle, trivial existence, much occupied in its lack of occupation. He did not reflect: he drifted along, absolutely happy.

On the morrow he would again set forth with Marie-Ange on

vagabond errands, teasing her with playful mockery, according to his custom. Nevertheless, he was more complimentary than at the beginning of their fellowship. In fact, he was astonished at the faculty of assimilation of this little maid, who, without any model, and merely through what she had heard from his lips in chance conversations, had gained a clear idea of true elegance. Her subtle instinct corrected her artless education, fashioned on the artificial models of a vanished epoch, by superannuated masters of decorum; and freeing herself of all that was foreign to her temperament, she expanded into a loveliness which was frank and unconstrained.

It seemed to him that there was already an abyss between the child whom he had encountered a few weeks before, and the young girl of to-day. Decidedly, she was more than charming, as he had thought her at first; and he gaily discussed with her the exact adjective for designating her blossoming loveliness.

“My gracious, you know, if you become still handsomer—”

And this was said so honestly and with such a hearty good feeling, that Marie-Ange, who would have gladly accepted the compliment with its qualification, was enraptured with his sincerity. There was never anything trite in his praises, the justice of which, strange to say, he himself would dispute.

These easy and familiar conversations became a sort of pleasant habit with her. She was secretly flattered by the attention bestowed upon her by Robert, which she felt to be increasing; and she was grateful to him, also, for the self-revelation of her own graces, which she owed to him. But for him, she would almost have been ignorant of herself. He had caused her to take a long step in advance in her knowledge of life; and though she could not yet explain to herself whitherward they tended, he had given her a multitude of aspirations to which she had hitherto been a stranger.





## V.

AYS that were spent in this solitude, where nothing could be expected of chance, could only be accentuated by devices of the imagination. Robert was not lacking in these ; his brain was fertile in resources, and the talent for invention and fiction which he

developed astonished him.

One day he said to Marie-Ange :

“Do you know, I have never seen your handwriting?”

“How could it be otherwise? We are never apart.”

“But I should like to know what they taught you at the convent.”

“An examination?” she exclaimed, laughing.

“Exactly.”

“Why, bless me, I was taught spelling—”

“Oh, it is not that sort of spelling that I mean. I say! we will imagine ourselves in love with each other—under difficulties.”

Marie-Ange’s cheeks flushed slightly.

“Yes,” he continued, “we will suppose, just as in a drama, that we adore each other, and that, instead of being merely the good friends that we are, we long for a union which is impossible. The captain is a tyrant, who has affianced you, in spite of yourself, to a man whom you execrate—naturally. He keeps a watch over you, and he suspects me.”

“Papa? Why, I am as free as the air, and he loves you with all his heart.”

She gazed at him perplexedly.

"But it is only make-believe. We will choose some fissure in the steep rock into which we will slip our ardent love-mis-sives. I will write you some desperate epistles in letters of fire. You shall answer in the same strain."

Puzzled, she tried to comprehend him, and to catch the idea that underlay this folly. She made a slight negative gesture.

But more and more pleased with his own idea, he set about persuading her, arguing with much ardor to exact from her a promise to take part in this fantasy. In actual fact, in unfolding his odd project, he had no other end in view than a somewhat more original diversion than those already enjoyed, more tempting because a little less permissible and conventional, and because of the pretence of secrecy between them.

"I promise you, Marie-Ange, that it will be exceedingly droll."

And a whole day was spent in discovering a particularly savage and romantic spot which would answer for this exchange of correspondence, and which also, according to the requirements of the comedy they were about to play, would serve as a secret place of meeting, where she was to arrive all trembling, affrighted, fearful of pursuit, and where he would await her, throbbing with anxious expectancy.

Marie-Ange made him explain to her at length the details of this singular game, thinking all the time that Robert was "fooling"; that he was indulging in one of the fantastic paradoxes which were habitual with him. But no, he set forth the whole thing with clever minuteness, described the deliciously perturbing sensations to be found in these illusions, yet with nothing of the serious about them; and in the end, she also was amused, after some final hesitancy, at the thought of this mimicry of passion.

After all sorts of playful discussion, they agreed upon the plot of their pretended love story. Yes, this was it: Captain Le Goëdic had promised the hand of his daughter, despite her

wishes, to some great booby, whom Marie-Ange detested. Robert was supposed to have hopelessly adored her for a long time. By a ruse he had introduced himself at the Point, diverting the old mariner from a knowledge of his intentions, seeking to lull his suspicions, and feigning in his presence complete indifference, but at the same time requiring all his fortitude to restrain him from self-betrayal.

"Poor papa !" murmured Marie-Ange, somewhat confused.

But Robert reassured her and attested his proper respect for the captain, who did not, indeed, need to know the part he was unsuspectingly to play. And, somehow or other, without any fixed motive whatever, and as a mere whim, he found pleasure in thus trying his influence over his cousin; feeling his vanity tickled upon finding that he had brought her to accept so chimerical a project. And it was really to this end that he had persisted in his persuasion, with all sorts of eloquent argument.

On the morrow they left the Point; not together, as usual, but each of them in an opposite direction, meeting a few minutes later at the place they had decided upon.

Marie-Ange had donned a sombre-hued costume, and she half hid her face with a large silken veil, tied up about her hair and drawn over her eyes. Without being as yet very much in earnest, but only to obey Robert, she turned her head from time to time and looked behind her, walking very quickly.

When she came in sight, Robert, who had concealed himself, suddenly appeared, as if by magic. He approached her; there was on his features an expression of anxiety; he seemed to be broken with emotion; his voice trembled.

"Oh !" exclaimed he, with a great burst of tragic tenderness, "how good of you to come ! I was so fearful, and the time seemed so long !

He passed his arm about her waist and made her sit down on a rock. Then he knelt before her; took her hands in his.

Overcome with surprise, she surrendered them to him ; he kissed them without her making any great resistance.

"Yes," he continued, "I know we have only a few minutes, and there may be, perhaps, some risk. Oh, Marie-Ange, let me tell you again that I am wholly yours, that we must triumph over all obstacles ! But you are here, my adored ; let us forget all else. Let us think only of the exquisite joys of this moment."

All this was said with a passionate anguish, yet in a tone so caressing ! Marie-Ange, though she had been prepared for a somewhat singular scene, was yet astounded ; her eyes opened wide with wonder.

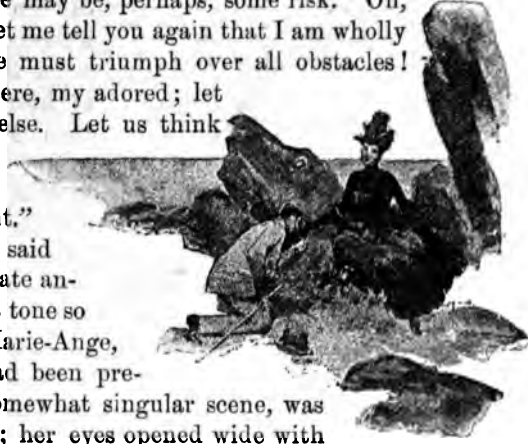
Suddenly Robert burst into a long fit of laughter.

"You see !" he said, "isn't it charming ? But your impersonation is not complete. You have positively not the least trepidation. Suppose we were to be surprised !"

"Ah, but it would be all the same. Oh, pardon me," she continued, recovering herself with a little effort, but without being quite able to preserve her seriousness, "it would be terrible !"

And, for the time, they suspended the comedy at that point. Robert merely amused himself by addressing little reproaches to her. That was not the toilet for such a meeting. Why this black in midsummer ? It would have attracted attention. An every-day dress, on the contrary, and as simple as possible ! At the same time, she displayed a certain aptitude. For a first attempt, he was satisfied.

The sky was obscured by great clouds which threatened



rain. They returned to the house, Robert giving his arm to his cousin. As the storm made good its menace, they quietly



played cards with the captain the rest of the afternoon, all three of them in the very best of humor. Now and then Marie-Ange cast a furtive glance at Robert, recalling with a little thrill of curi-

osity the grand phrases which he had uttered a little while before; while he, wholly occupied with his game, marked the points, and said to Le Goëdic:

“Why, my dear captain, you play like a novice to-day.”

“What an odd fellow this Robert is!” thought she; but at heart she was delighted with his strange fancies, even while she could not help feeling somewhat dazed, however stoutly she dissimulated it, by this quest of emotions.

But little by little she discovered a liking for it. Although it was merely a species of pleasantry, this mystery between them seemed infinitely amusing; and she experienced a sort of thrill when Robert, who had been so perfectly quiet all the evening, playfully slipped these words into her ear, on taking leave of her for the night, carrying her back at once into the realm of comedy which they had just left:

“What fortitude it has required to seem calm while my suffering has been so great!”

In spite of all that had passed, she looked at him in astonishment. She had yet to accustom herself to the so-called developments of this intrigue.

And, as if he had promptly seized the moment when Le Goëdic turned his back,—the worthy man was placidly lighting his candle by the lantern in the vestibule, still laughing at one of Robert’s pleasantries,—he added, very quickly:

“To-morrow, at the same place, you will find a letter.”

Despite herself, Marie-Ange waited for this letter with some impatience, and Robert's good-humored air at breakfast appeared to her to be pregnant with surprises. The hypocrite ! Could he have appeared more utterly careless, more free from anxiety ? He had a cast-iron appetite. He discussed with Pasq the recipe of a dish that he had requested of her, with great apparent interest. Nevertheless, Marie-Ange had seen him go out in the morning, and from her window her eyes had followed him in the direction of the rocks, where in one hour she was to meet him.

She was for a moment disturbed when he declared at table that he expected to shut himself up all day in his chamber, to catch up in his correspondence, which was much behindhand ; and for an instant she could not refrain from a little pout of vexation. But a glance from Robert reassured her. This was only another feint to give a piquancy to their meeting, and to lend it a semblance of difficulty.

Robert, leaving the captain at the laborious task of copying his journals, did indeed ascend to his chamber ; but he left it very quickly, crossing the corridor on tiptoe and gliding out of doors. And he hastened to conceal himself behind the rocks which had been chosen as the particularly picturesque scene of this pretended idyl. He wanted to watch the demeanor of Marie-Ange when, believing herself to be alone, she should read his missive.

He waited ; and waiting is so much a fever which intoxicates, that he experienced a sensuous delight in espying her approach, just as if, in order to come thither, she had really to effect an audacious escape, to cross abysses. He recalled his adventures of other days, hours of anguish, during which he really believed himself to be in love ; female faces passed before his eyes again, and, looking backward, he felt the pangs of a past suspense which seemed to him, in fact, the best part of love.

Marie-Ange arrived, light-footed, charming in her emotion,

which he could surmise. She easily found the fissure in the rock which was to serve as a letter-box, but she gave a gesture of indecision, of final hesitancy. One would have said that she was asking herself whether it was not a very grave matter, thus to throw herself into folly, after all, even when the programme of the sport had been fixed beforehand.

However, after an instant, she put out her hand and drew forth the letter, which she read hurriedly where she stood. The sunlight played about her neck, gilded her chestnut frizzes, and cast luminous bars across her robe. Robert, from his niche, watched her eagerly, losing not a movement of her countenance, which was deeply crimsoned. No, never, surely, had she read anything like this. But something resembling vexation at intervals manifested itself in her visage. Robert well understood her feeling, and amused himself by analyzing it. While preserving a certain playful style, he had scattered gross exaggerations throughout his ardent declaration, having reference to the obstacles which were supposed to impede their happiness. And naively, a little flustered by the burning words which he employed, she appeared to regret that they were so quickly contradicted by fantastic conceits, like a mocking accompaniment. Thus, when you have just turned a few captivating pages of a romance, you feel angry with the author if, through caprice or lack of skill, he suddenly lowers you from the ideal of fantasies which he has half revealed, to the sordid and commonplace.

She remained pensive a moment ; then, taking a resolve, she wrote with a pencil a few words on a leaf of her note-book and slipped it into the hiding place. Then she took several steps in the direction of the Point ; a trifle put out, apparently, at finding herself alone. She almost felt melancholy, of a sudden ; but it was a melancholy in which there was an absorbing charm which enveloped her in a vague revery. The forms of things insensibly disappeared from before her eyes ; while, on the other hand, the thousand sounds of na-

ture came to her in all their distinctness, with a fineness of perception which she had never before experienced.

She half reclined on the heath, her head supported upon one of her hands, abandoning herself with delight to this half-languid state, which had all the charm of novelty for her.

The moment he saw her move away, Robert had swiftly and cautiously approached the rock, seized her response, and cast his eye over it. Then, holding it in his hand, he laughingly approached the young girl.

"Ah! how frigid it is!" said he; "the naughty creature!"

Marie-Ange gave a little start of surprise. She arose and made a gesture as if to take back her letter, which he promptly held beyond her reach; showing it to her by way of challenge.

"No," he continued, jauntily, "you do not appear at all to suspect that I am suffering horribly! It's enough to discourage one from being unhappy!"

And though she attempted, through a sort of bashfulness, to prevent it, he slowly repeated the terms of the brief missive.

She had written it like a school-girl composition, turning her phrases in the "elevated style" which had been formerly recommended to her for narrative themes of a totally different character, in which she identified herself with the unmeaning passions which the professor of literature attributed to a classical hero.

She spoke of "hope that triumphs over all," of the "resignation that had its charm and its glory,"—sentences which had returned to her memory instinctively.

And Robert teased her about these ready-made formulas; declared himself broken-hearted over such great indifference, lamenting that she was so cruel, and, while his visage belied the anguish which he expressed, putting such passion and ardor



into his complaints that she gazed at him, speechless with amazement.

She laughed with him finally, affirming that she was incapable of sustaining the part. Through a remnant of bashfulness, she exacted that he should destroy the letter, and her eyes followed for a long time the little bits of paper as they flew away upon the wind.

"Do you know," she said, scolding Robert, with her finger upraised, "you make me afraid? What sort of man are you, anyhow?"

"Oh, Marie-Ange, simply a man who has a horror of monotony."

Submitting to his influence, in spite of herself, she fell more and more into the spirit of his fantasy, exchanging repartee with him with a dissimulative art which had a most subtle development.

They went so far as to imagine, with a most perfect agreement, all sorts of difficulties. They amused themselves, even while they were chatting with the captain, by appointing meetings in a mysterious language that they understood, though they had devised for it no fixed formulas. Heaven knows the worthy man was far from suspecting the sense of these words. He would have found it the most natural thing in the world between cousins, free as they were, that they should arrange meetings at such hours of the day as they liked. But they experienced a singular sensation of pleasure in thus injecting a peculiar significance into conversations which in appearance were most commonplace.

The last traces of Marie-Ange's repugnance had departed. She obeyed Robert in everything that he proposed; only she indemnified with a coaxing tenderness the captain's unconscious part of guardian-in-a-comic-opera which he was made to play. For the deception she was practising, innocent though it was, still troubled her a little.

On his part, Robert deliberately augmented the imaginary

obstacles. When, for instance, he had appointed a meeting for one o'clock, he contrived that Le Goëdic should invite him to a fishing party, simply that he might have the delight of inventing some laborious stratagem to escape from the species of trap which he had voluntarily set for himself.

Breathless, he would arrive from the further end of the island to join Marie-Ange, where she was awaiting him.

"Ha!" he would exclaim, enraptured, "if it were only real, how delightful it would be to be thus together! would it not?"

"Oh, Robert!" said Marie-Ange, "I really believe that you have bewitched me. I almost regret our good simple friendship of the past!"

But he well knew how to fascinate her with a hundred mad sallies, born of the situation which he persisted in imagining. The only manifestation thus far had been in words merely. The comedy had not proceeded to temerity of action. And really, Robert, possessing a special ingenuity in the diabolically refined complications which he had invented, thought of nothing but the farce that he was pursuing, as a fashionable actor in a parlor comedy falls at the feet of the lovely woman with whom he is playing, thinking only, with an artist's pride in his work, of presenting an illusion that seems a reality.

This paradoxical correspondence continued in the midst of the calm and familiar existence at the Point, undisturbed by the least incident. Having worked his theme up to the pitch of an *allegro passionato*, Robert now slipped flaming epistles into the fissure in the rock, proposing the plan of an abduction to Marie-Ange, who a moment before had been tranquilly seated by his side. But he found Marie-Ange herself very pensive, and when he approached her, she had a manner of looking at him which caused him a little thrill.

"Well," said he, nevertheless, with his habitual gaiety, "your answer? Come, is it to-morrow that I am to abduct you in a

bark which shall traverse every breaker and baffle all pursuit? It will give us a fine appetite in the evening."

"Are you always in jest?" she replied in a voice which she strove not to make serious.

"Of course!"

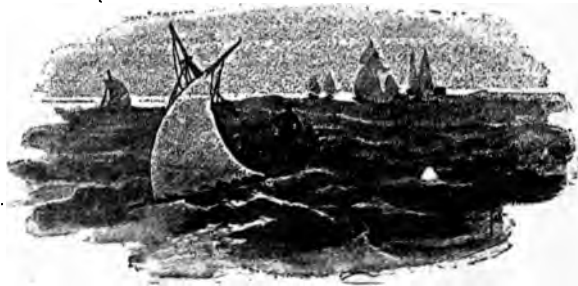
"Well, as for me—I have done jesting."

A blush covered her cheeks and she hid her face for a moment in her hands.

"Why, pray?" asked Robert.

"Because—"

Despite himself, he felt suddenly moved. At this moment Marie-Ange appeared lovelier to him than ever before. He gazed at her with a sort of profound tenderness which seemed



to melt his whole heart, depriving him of all energy, and for an instant extinguishing the smile upon his lips.

He took one of Marie-Ange's hands, but she quickly withdrew it.

"What is the matter?" said he. "You have permitted me to take your hand a hundred times before this without offence."

"That was in jest."

"And this?"

"Let us not jest any more, please—no, let us not jest any more."

And here a little nervous contraction played about her mouth, despite her efforts to master herself. She suddenly

gave a sob—she could not repress it—and it angered her against herself.

“There!” said she, “I am silly to-day.”

Robert had knelt softly beside her, and with infinite delicacy he detained her hands, to prevent her from covering her face, while he gently wiped away her tears.

“My dear little Marie-Ange, what have I done to you? What have you against me? Have I not always tenderly respected you, even in jest? I thought only to amuse you, nothing more.”

“Nothing more,” repeated Marie-Ange, so softly, so very softly, that it was like a murmur, a sorrowful sigh.

And suddenly Robert had a revelation! It came to him like a flash, blinding him at first; indeed, the sensation was like that of a dazzling burst of light just before him.

“My God!” he cried, growing pale.

Marie-Ange now became almost emboldened. She seemed to desire to make a confidence of all that weighed upon her poor little heart. But she knew well that her lips did not need to explain a great deal, for Robert had guessed it.

In the midst of her own agitation she could see that he was deeply moved, and that his accustomed air of raillery had disappeared.

In fact, at the moment when she opened her lips, Robert closed them with a kiss.

She started with a violence that shook her whole body; she almost swooned; then, with a little gesture of anger, she murmured an “O!” which was expressive of surprised indignation.

“How can I make myself believed, now,” said Robert, coaxingly, “when I swear to you that I love you? Yes, Marie-Ange, it would be madness to go on playing at love when the simple reality is so sweet.”

She still resisted, though her eyes had suddenly dried and a great joy filled her heart.

"Yes, darling," he continued, "I love you. Come! do I look as if I were pretending now? How could it be otherwise? What a fool I was to invent all sorts of chimeras, when I feel at this moment a real tenderness which completely overcomes me! I love you! I love you! and our comedy, if you consent, shall finish in marriage, as all comedies do. But once more, does it not seem clear enough that I adore you? When I was jesting, did I have this little tremor of the voice of which I am now conscious? Was I agitated as I now am? Was I anxious, almost timid?"

"Oh! timid!" exclaimed Marie-Ange. And then she smiled, as she thought of the kiss which had thrown her into such delicious confusion.

"Why, yes; since I am well aware that I should ask pardon for having gone on a wild-geese chase."

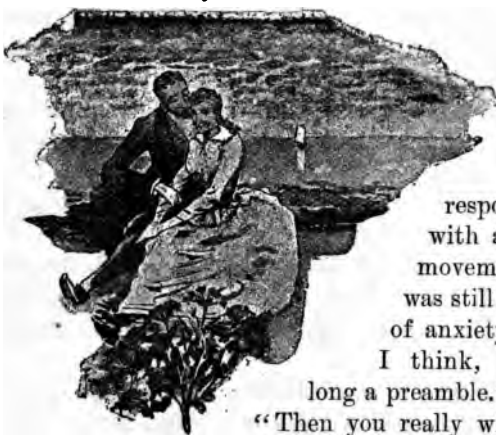
"So you were really taken in your own trap?"

"Yes; but I rejoice now that I had that extravagant notion, since it has led me to repeat in real earnest what I have said to you in fun."

"Ah, Robert," responded Marie-Ange, with a pretty impulsive movement, in which there was still a slight suggestion of anxiety, "I should not, I think, have required so long a preamble."

"Then you really will! How good of you! If you knew what a nice little couple we shall make!"

Robert recovered his fine humor. Seriously, he had for an instant had a poignant sensation, almost of fear, so sudden had it been. Marie-Ange, all at once, had seemed to him as



if transfigured and exalted; and, in that sort of radiance which in his eyes appeared to clothe her, greatly to be desired. If, after having almost given herself to him, she had drawn back, what would have become of him? In a second, all this had passed through his mind. But, no; fortunately, she had not amused or avenged herself by causing him to suffer, the darling! once she was sure of the rapid transformation of his playful pretences into sincere sentiment.

He laughed, and seating himself beside Marie-Ange, gently took her head between his hands and kissed the little curls at the back of her neck.

"It is permissible now, my little wife. How perfectly natural it seems to call you so!"

The sun was declining. The distant heath was flooded with crimson, in a superb conflagration of color, and all about them was a ruddy glow. Robert reminded her that it was thus that he had rapturously contemplated her on the day of their first meeting, in a sort of symphony of red, as he left the island behind him. The sea, too, shimmered redly now, as if aflame, mottled in gorgeous sheen.

"O Nature!" exclaimed Robert, gaily assuming his lyric vein, "be thou the witness of our earliest vows! And thou, Sun, vainly dost thou set the heavens aflame! my heart more hotly burns than they!"

"Come!" said Marie-Ange, "he can't, even for a minute, be serious. Robert, my joy is so recent! Do not alarm me by jesting about it."

"Well, let me kiss your hand, and so prevent me from talking to you."

He drew her towards him, and they walked together along the little road redolent with sweet, wild odors, clasping her hands and keeping his lips pressed closely against them.

And thus they were affianced.



## VI.

QUIETLY Robert signalled to Marie-Ange, when the dinner was over, and Le Goëdic, lighting his pipe, went in search of his journal to resume his transcription of it.

The captain must be told, nevertheless.

Somehow or other, the latter felt a little melancholy this evening. He was on the last pages, at the moment of his return to

France, and they bore but little beside these laconic entries:

“28th.—Nothing to note.

“29th.—Id.

“30th.—Id. Sea fine. Id.”

It was in vain that he took time and pains with his handwriting; he saw the moment approach when he would have to close the book. Despite himself, though he declared that he was perfectly happy, a nostalgia of the sea began to take possession of him. What had become of the fine schooner which he had so long commanded? He longed for her. Certainly he adored his daughter; but one does not so easily get rid of an infernal love of the ocean when one has been faithful to it all his life. And then he felt almost ashamed of his inaction. Was he already so old, so incapable of energy or decision, that he was to spend the remainder of his days in stupid indolence?

In order to defer the moment when he should write the words “The End,” in the copy of his journal, he had begun to re-read the previous volumes. ’Sblood! He had lived, in those days! He happened upon the recital of a typhoon in the vicinity of the Isle of the Reunion,\* during which, with

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\* Bourbon.

wind and tide against him, he had saved his ship without losing a rope's end or a handspike. He had been a fine fellow, a keen mariner, at that epoch. Ah, and now ! Had his experience all flown ? All these suggestions sharpened his regrets. Yet the good man bravely concealed them ; and that Marie-Ange might not be uneasy,—poor, blind papa, who believed that he alone occupied his daughter's heart,—with that delicacy of feeling which these rude sailors know well how to show upon occasion, he affected to be interested in matters agricultural. But the devil a thing did he understand about them !

"Aha!" he would say, rubbing his hands with a knowing air, talking of a small piece of tilled ground that had been redeemed from the rocks, "the wheat is coming up well."

The "wheat" was rye. In spite of all his endeavors, he had never yet been quite able to tell them apart. Such were the notions of agrarian industry which he let fall.

He had returned to his journal, and in order to lengthen by all possible means a pleasure that he felt was drawing to its term, he scrutinized his pen by the lamplight, changed the position of his inkstand, ruled lines in the book.

"Papa," said Marie-Ange, approaching him, "suppose you leave off your journal this evening."

Leave off his book ! It seemed to him suddenly, through some remnant of his old methodical habits, that this would be a breach of duty.

"Aha !" he said, removing his spectacles, and using the sailor's language, with which he consoled himself in his repose, "there's frolic aboard."

"That is—well, yes ; if you like—it depends upon you."

She placed her arms about his neck, and with a childish, coquettish gesture, patted his gray head.

"Papa," she continued, "are you of the sort who can bear all kinds of news, without ambiguity, without circumlocution ?"



"Why," responded Le Goëdic, much puzzled, "the sea ought to harden us to everything, don't you know? A flaw comes up quickly and surprises us before we have time to think. But what's in the wind, little one? You both look so odd."

"Oh! it is not a flaw this time—on the contrary. Indeed, just look at Robert, who is playing the hypocrite over there in his corner, and keeping a solemn face. Does this not suggest anything to you?"

Le Goëdic turned towards Robert.

"Ah, that's so! He's not himself, either. What have you two been plotting against me now?"

"Then you cannot guess?"

"Dear me! a surprise?"

"Yes, a surprise; it's just that."

She summoned Robert and said archly:

"Come, shall we speak?"

"What a lot of mystery!" said Le Goëdic.

Robert had approached. He seated himself on a little footstool, close to the old mariner, and with sincere feeling took his hands in his. "Captain," said he, with some agitation, "would you be very loth to call me your son one of these days? This is the surprise; and if you would make me very happy—"

"You may speak in the plural," added Marie-Ange, very tenderly.

"If you would make both of us very happy,—well, you will say 'yes,' just as simply as I have permitted myself to speak of it; for ever since I have been here under your roof, I have loved you with all my heart!"

"Ah, the cajoler!" cried Le Goëdic, "just see! He wants to rob me of my daughter, and without even saying 'Look out!' And he doesn't give me the time to—"

"To—?" queried Robert, more agitated than he could have believed at first.

"To make a fuss about giving her to him."

Marie-Ange put her arms about his neck again and gave him a vigorous kiss.

"Ah, you are a good papa!"

"Bless me!" replied *Le Goëdic*, with his frank laugh, "I have always let you have your own way."

"That was wisdom itself," said Robert.

"Do you think so? And I, who saw nothing and guessed nothing," said the captain, "like the old fool that I am! All the same, you were not slow about it, you weren't. And you tackle the affair gamely. Pshaw! it's the best way. Come, my children, come here, while I kiss you."

"Tableau," murmured Robert, his Parisian banter getting the better of him; though he was really affected by the joy of the moment.

The captain had certainly had a great surprise; and, upon the abrupt disclosure that had been made to him, his only thought had been the happiness of his daughter. But now that he had recovered himself a little, he pondered his desire to go to sea again; at the same time reproaching himself ingenuously for this besetting idea. Yet why not, now?

Robert pleased him as a son-in-law. He had already, indeed, an entirely paternal affection for this overgrown boy. It had come to him all at once, spontaneously. Since Marie-Ange loved him, all was for the best. He had, perhaps, been a little imprudent in allowing Robert so much liberty, not foreseeing anything. But so long as it ended well! As regarded fortune, the situation of the two young folks was about equal. They had enough to live on.

"Come," continued he, "you are right. There's frolic aboard."

And, according to ancient usage, he desired that the betrothed should both drink out of the same glass.

The servant, *Pasq*, all in a flurry over the news, had gone to

fetch a bottle of ancient wine from the cellar, a wine of a golden hue, rejoicing the soul.



"Let us not make light of our old Breton customs," said Le Goëdic, gravely.

And when they had drunk, Pasq took the glass and broke it into pieces.

Robert looked at her, astonished.

"That's in order that the marriage may be lucky," said she, very seriously.

Robert was amused by all these relics of superstition. Who would have imagined, only a short time before, that one day he would be betrothed after the Breton custom, and that, with great delight and scarcely any astonishment, he would witness these romantic rites, observed on his own account?

The date of the marriage was promptly fixed. Why should it be retarded? Was there not a Breton proverb which said, "Good things should never be put off"?

In truth, good Captain Le Goëdic several times asserted the necessity of his making the journey to Lorient and Vannes, because of preparations for the ceremony, which he desired to see accompanied by the largest hospitality. He returned from each of these excursions to "terra firma" with his hands full, blushing like a school-boy caught in the act when questioned as to the details of the employment of his time, and stammering out confused explanations; for he was but little at ease in anything like dissimulation.

It was only on the morning of the nuptials that he announced to his daughter and his son-in-law that he was about to go to sea again. This had been his secret.

Ah, poor captain, if you had known how small a part these

tidings of your departure played at that moment in the engrossing thoughts of the young couple! Tidings that were yet announced with so many touching precautions. But can we ask of those who are happy not to be wrapt up in themselves?

## VII.



NSCONCED in one corner of a coach of the Paris night express, Marie-Ange leaned upon Robert's shoulder.

He caressed her loosened locks, and, as they were alone in the compartment, he indulged himself by punctuating his words with little kisses on

the back of her neck, that thrilled at his touch.

He still chatted, ever gaily, ever mockingly; growing more and more Parisian the nearer they approached Paris; bewildering the delighted Marie-Ange, then pausing to ask her laughingly if she did not want to sleep.

She to sleep, perturbed as she was? Certainly not! Only, a languor, which seemed delightful, took full possession of her, rendered her incapable of everything save lending her lips, aye! and with all earnestness, to the sought-for caresses.

"You see, Marie Ange," said he, "they have made a redoubtable thing of marriage. It is surrounded by ceremonies that intimidate by inquisition and by gloomy readings from legal books; as if two beings who ask merely to give themselves entirely to their affection must on the moment be accused of some crime. 'You swear?—you consent?—you surely understand to what you are binding yourself?' And they remind you at the same time of all sorts of ideas which are far from gay, about cleaving to each other in the days of misfortune, about submission, and obedience. This casts a chill over you that, somehow or other, paralyzes you, and leaves an impression which lasts sometimes a whole lifetime. As for

me, it is not thus that I should conceive of the intervention of the law. I would have it cheerful, full of good-will, of indulgent tenderness, replacing those barbarous formulas with I know not what graceful symbols; causing the union which it forms to be understood without too great stress—delicately, without emphasizing too strongly, as is done now, the change of condition. I do not just know what forms would be necessary; I have only an idea of them. A competition should be opened among the poets for the invention of the proper symbols—something less rigorous, which would not seem, in fact, like a sentence of death. By Jove! two doves suddenly taking flight out of the mayor's hat! That would be a little too trite, perhaps, a little too classical. But, bless me, it would make folks unbend themselves a little. I cannot comprehend why, on a festive day like that, a morose demeanor is imposed upon you, and why it should not be proper, according to our usages, to respond with a natural, smiling, radiant countenance to the reading of the magistrate's villainous little book,—he with the tri-colored scarf. And then why shut you up in a room which is hung with green paper, instead of having a real stage setting, all flowers, with joyous allegories that would lift one's thoughts high up unto the zenith? Indeed, while the good man is mumbling his legal verbiage to himself, to please the law, they should hold each other by the hand, in a pretty attitude; and when he has finished, he should give them a sign. Then the pair should kiss each other on the lips—minus false modesty—just as I do, thus!"

And Robert bent down close to Marie-Ange's face. Without opening her eyes, the better to taste of her happiness, she felt a violent, an ecstatic thrill.

Being now well started, he kept on, amusing himself by his own talk.

"It is so! They repeat to you in every fashion that marriage is a solemn thing. They harass you with the duties

which it implies; not a word do they say of its rights. And if you make use of them, you always seem to be abusing them. A species of hypocrisy frowns upon certain demonstrations, which it barely tolerates. 'You must be very good!' it seems to say. And even when people adore each other, they restrain themselves, temper their ardor, hesitate to give themselves up entirely to each other. They reproach themselves for those adorable follies that plague their brains, their hearts, their senses—and they stop short. Though they are madly fond of each other, they may never know each other completely, may never give more than the half of themselves, though they are dying with the desire to share the frenzy of which they both have promptings. What is it that prevents them? The vision of the solemn gentleman at the *mairie*, the ridiculous manner in which he deported himself—a crabbed old sermonizer. All this is the fault of the crotchety ceremony which quenches, as with a bucket of ice-water, all the ardent emotions that are about to burst forth, without waiting for prosy reflection. The priest, at least, amidst the odor of incense, the burning tapers, the blazing of colored glass, the music of the organ, speaks more effectively to the whole being. Does he fancy, egad! that he addresses himself to the soul alone? That one this morning was a little tedious. The delicious, nervous agitation into which one is thrown by these adorable pagan rites which the Church has preserved ought to last only an instant, so that it may remain more vividly imprinted upon the memory." He interrupted himself with a laugh. "But, on my word, here I am delivering a lecture, and you are saying nothing."

"Oh, I?" said Marie-Ange, with a little effort, "what do you want me to say? I am dazzled, as it were. My soul is all in a glow."

"Well, I will give you my theory of marriage. A theory of revolt. Simply that. I ask of love all of its fever, all of its transports, and that they shall not become stale because they

are permissible; love, without the cold shower-bath of reason, without enforced gravity, without conventionality, without monotony; but love with its caprices, its fantasies, its frenzies. The law tells us to love each other. Oh, my little Marie-Ange, we shall give the law a spectacle which will disconcert it a little! If it imagines that it will prevent us from being madly enamored of each other, it makes a great mistake, egad! Oh, but I am a terrible fellow, am I not?" he concluded, with a hearty laugh.

"Oh, yes!" murmured Marie-Ange, with her pretty little pout, "a terrible fellow—a fellow who gives himself up to clever philosophical considerations, it is true, but who does not even inform his wife that he loves her!"

She nestled up against him, nerveless, almost pulseless with joy, clasping her arms about his neck and continuing, close to his ear,

"It is I who have to make the confession!"

Robert was not so silly as to respond in words. He seized her hands, her head, her shoulders, and showered ardent kisses upon them.

And Marie-Ange, unwearying, accepted his caresses, maintaining a chaste and pretty attitude the while, which deepened the intoxication of the moment.

The train slackened its speed. They heard the heavy sound of coaches that were being switched upon neighboring tracks; the bright light of a station suddenly inundated them with its glow. The cries of the trainmen rang out:

"Rennes! Ten minutes' stop!"

Men came with lanterns and struck lightly on the wheels. Waiters from the lunch-room passed. The doors of a waiting-room opened.

"Good gracious!" said Marie-Ange, "suppose some one should get in!"

Their great dread had been lest they should have a traveling companion; for they had been unable at Vannes to secure



a private compartment. And at each stop, this anxiety was renewed—a kind of voluptuous anguish, followed by a triumphal joy when the peril was passed.

Some one opened the door of the compartment. A black form advanced, climbed half way up the steps, and then drew back. It was a priest. He had cast a rapid glance about him, and had caught a glimpse of Marie-Ange's disordered head, unbonneted so that she might the better recline upon her husband's shoulder. Was it Christian charity that caused him to comprehend that it would have been cruel to disturb these two lovers? or was it simply an instinctive apprehension? He again seized the satchel which he had thrown upon the seat opposite the pair, and went elsewhere to find a refuge.

"I was right in speaking well of the priests," said Robert, gayly. "There is one, certainly, who knows his duty."

The train again started. And they playfully heaved a great sigh of deliverance when the locomotive resumed its panting progress in the thick darkness which enveloped the route.

"Come," said Marie-Ange, "please continue your theories. I only interrupted them, just now, because they prevented my having a kiss."

"Oh, I have finished! Do you really ever expect any fixed course of conduct from me? I am greatly astounded that I have two consecutive ideas; it is rarely my habit. And yet, at hazard, I know well what I should like: that marriage through its consecration should not be a weight upon life, after it has satisfied the proprieties, against which I do not protest. This tie ought not to trammel. It should neither make itself over-felt, nor restrain the desires, the effusion, and the development of the tender emotions. We are married: that is what satisfies the world, to which we have an account to render. It is all that it need know of us. But we shall freely arrange our life according to our liking, independently

of tradition, of all method. We shall go as we will, and—what shall I say?—we shall forget as quickly as possible the legitimate aspect of our love, which for that very reason would be deprived of its piquancy. In fine, I dream of something more than a mere monotonous, humdrum life. I still hope for the unexpected, the new, even the improbable, in our existence, which shall be solely consecrated to the refined cultivation of this love. All this startles you a little, does it not, Marie-Ange? But you will understand me. For others, marriage is an epilogue; for us, it shall be a beginning. Instead of arriving at the haven, we launch ourselves out into the midst of the tempest. Do you behold us, calm, sedate folk that we are, tranquilly awaiting the approved hour of conjugal effusions because it is the reasonable and homely usage, as in those staid households which have a stated time for every occupation? There are some things which I cannot explain to you yet. You must first experience that delightful initiation of the mind which follows the initiation of the senses, and through which comes the profound divination of the passional mysteries.”

She listened now with her eyes wide open, surprised, almost fearful, though delightfully so; not quite comprehending these half-spoken thoughts, but stirred by the force of his words, which seemed like some perturbing music, suggesting confused glimpses of glowing horizons. These vague ideas passed before her mind with a sort of inexplicable and persistent vision of flaming skies, in the midst of which other fires were flickering with a softer effulgence.

And then she found Robert handsomer and more manly than she had thought him down yonder, though he had lost none of his gaiety. He had only appeared charming then; now her imagination magnified him, so to speak. She remarked details about him that before had escaped her, hints of a certain will-force in his features, though they did not convey an essential impression of energy; a will-force which

she felt must be employed, with singular strength of persuasion, in minor things. Her own will was prostrated and deliciously subdued before this new and potent domination.

"It is you who make me talk now, Marie-Ange," said Robert. "You must pay me for my trouble."

Thereupon followed renewed caresses and embraces, charmingly silly utterances of incoherent words; in a word, all that constitutes love's simplest language in every idiom under the sun.

Again the train slackened its speed. Ah! the presence, now, of an interloper would no longer have been merely a bore, but an absolute torture! At the outset of the journey they might have resigned themselves, reluctantly, it is true; but now they were enraged at the very idea of the presence of a third person at their *tête-à-tête*.

So, as Robert, on leaning out of the window, had perceived the lights of a station near at hand, they again became children, and with feverish haste they made up a species of manikin with their mantles, lap-robés, and petty packages, vaguely outlining the massive profile of a sleeping traveller. And to complete the illusion, they placed in the rack just above what should have been his head, some of their small luggage. The mannikin, by the glimmer of the gaslight, sifting through a bluish screen and dimly illumining the apartment, suggested quite effectively the idea of an ill-bred giant stretched insolently out on the seat.

"Wait!" said Robert, "I have another idea."

He drew a case of cigarettes from his pocket and took two from it. Lighting one, he handed the other to Marie-Ange:

"Would you be afraid to puff it a couple of times?"

At the stoppage of the train, Marie-Ange, coughing a little, but still with a fine assurance, drew upon a Russian cigarette.

An old lady, led by a railroad employé, acted as if she were about to enter the coach. But she gave a gesture of horror

at sight of the woman who was smoking, and, hardly suppressing a cry of indignation, she fled.

"Saved! Saved again!" exclaimed Marie-Ange, joyously; and to dissipate the little cloud of smoke which had gathered, Robert let the air into the coach for a moment. Then he returned to Marie-Ange, and, kissing her insanely, sighed:

"Great Heavens! How long this journey is! Ah! I can comprehend now the ardor of those pilgrims who kneel before an altar at the end of each stage of their pilgrimage, taking breath for its renewal."

"Oh, Robert, how gallant you are!"

Suddenly the expression of his visage, on which there was a sort of exasperation, dissimulated by a smile, struck her. And she, too, felt the gay, jesting spirit die within her. She was feverish; beneath her gloves her hands were burning. She could not explain what was passing within her. She feared almost to be close to Robert.

"Darling," said he, "I am very selfish. You must be weary. There—slumber upon my shoulder; I'll not stir. Come, lean your head, so."

With gentlest movements, he had taken her head and had inclined it delicately towards him. She suddenly experienced so great a confusion, such a keen embarrassment, that she did not mind this new position, glad of a pretext to hide her emotion. What ailed her? At that moment she dared not look at Robert.

"Yes, that is it," she murmured; "I shall go to sleep. You will watch over me. You are very good to be my pillow. I am all right—all right."

She settled down, made two or three little movements, as if to seek the best position, slowly dropped her eyelids, sighed a soft "good-night," and did not stir.

But was this immobility slumber? Her respiration was neither calm nor restful, and a sort of panting movement

swelled her bosom, a kind of anguish, not made of suffering, but of an inexplicable impatience.

Robert gazed at her longingly. He ran over in his memory the swift history of this sweet marriage, diverting and unforeseen, without episodes of suspense or disquietude. All that had come to pass was so droll a fantasy, despite the solemn consecration of this idyllic adventure.

And how lovely she was in this abandoned pose which she had instinctively taken without conscious effort. Really, she had an innate elegance which was charming.

Now that for the first time in his presence she had closed her eyes, he could gaze at her freely and without constraint, as something belonging wholly to himself. He saw in her the woman, and he pictured beneath the drapery of her garments the graces of that form which was to be all his own. He eagerly analyzed, so to speak, this young, slender, supple creature, of whom he was to be the master. He became intoxicated with the images which were thus suggested to him. Even in the eyes of the law, which just now he had so gaily mocked at, it was his right to indulge in these perturbing fancies.

He thought that Marie-Ange's tresses, which just touched his face, were scented very sweetly, and he bent his head, trying to define the perfume, so as to divert his mind from the suggestions that so furiously assailed him.

Again he pulled out his watch, slowly and very gently, to count the time which yet divided them from Paris, taking a thousand precautions not to risk disturbing her in that delightful position, both out of regard for her comfort, and because he wished to keep her there.

How long it was! Then, not at all resigned, and prolonging this little manoeuvre in order to consume the time, he resumed his former attitude, believing he had not betrayed himself.

It appeared to him, at bottom, that he was somewhat ridiculous. But he was seized, above all, with a wild temptation to

kiss Marie-Ange madly on her lips, which were so near his own. And he was shaken all over by little thrills, which, by a species of self-aggravation, extended to his lips, and to which he would not yield, for fear of waking her, if she were really asleep.

But each time that he drew near in this way, Marie-Ange appeared to undergo a magnetic attraction, and her cheeks became empurpled. One does not blush when asleep. Ah! if it were not a little cruel to learn whether she really slept or not!

A stupid thing happened him, besides. The arm against which Marie-Ange was leaning grew tired and painful from the pressure. He sought a way of withdrawing it so that she would not know it, or of explaining his movement, which had become unavoidable, should she feel it.

And in the solitude of the night and in the midst of his besetting thoughts, this small fact assumed for him an irritating importance. Then, were she to open her eyes after this interval in their talk, would not a certain constraint assert itself in their conversation?

But all of these reflections failed to occupy his mind. He thought at one moment of trying to sleep,—but if Marie-Ange were to look at him then! What would she think of him, so ridiculously lacking in gallantry! Besides, he felt sure that she was only simulating slumber at this critical moment, thus taking advantage of the right of woman to wear a mask when she chooses. He divined in her a sort of unconscious complicity of emotion.



The train rushed on through the black night with its great sobbing breath. Where were they? He no longer knew. In his exaggerated impatience he even lost the notion of time. He was only sure of one thing, that he was there, close beside Marie-Ange; that he adored her, and that, perhaps, without comprehending as well as he did the pangs of love, she was wondering at his silence; for at this moment the real offence would be to respect her repose if it were only pretended. He reflected upon the absurdity of the situation should it be prolonged. But he was embarrassed to find a way out of it, losing something of his composure, and, at length, really, sincerely suffering from the agitation of his thoughts. Visions of the hours they had spent in playing together at love passed suddenly and with a singular distinctness before him. He



remembered that one day while they ran laughingly back to the Point to escape from a storm which had just broken forth, her linen dress, wet with the rain, had clung closely to her form, revealing to him certain of its youthful contours, and he had, for the first time, felt a perturbing emotion. This scene passed again before his eyes and disturbed him. Again, he saw her in the sea while he swam beside her, and quickly as even the modest Pasq could tender the white woollen wrapper in which she shiveringly enveloped herself when she issued from the waves, he followed her hypocritically, with a gaze which was as yet more curious than enamored, marking the outline of her slender figure.

A rude swaying of the coach, already (in the brutal haste of the express) quite jerky in its movement, suddenly brought his lips very near to those of Marie-Ange.

He was electrified as if this brief contact had set him on fire. Marie-Ange's great eyes gazed at him with a shadow of apprehension, and this gaze, caught for one instant, sank deep into his soul. The eyes questioned his with a sort of affright, but they did not forbid. He lost all self-control; he did not tear himself away from this embrace, by which chance had united them. He covered her with kisses, to which, almost swooning and overcome by this ultimate surprise of the senses, she had hardly strength to respond. He clasped her furiously. She uttered a little cry of terror and sank into his arms.

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## VIII.



It was barely daybreak when the carriage stopped before the house in the Avenue de Messine. A few gas-jets were still flickering in the pale dawn. During the half-hour that the ride had lasted, after leaving the Mont

Parnasse station, at first amazed by this great Paris with which she was unacquainted, which she had imagined to be almost fairy-like, and which, seen vaguely and confusedly through the windows of the hackney-coach, appeared particularly formidable, Marie-Ange had ceased to be astonished. Indeed, it was as if she were out of the world. She did not know, since that initial kiss, whether she was awake, or whether she was still under the potent spell of a dream. Her head was very heavy; she felt an almost painful lassitude; she could hardly keep her eyes open, and it seemed to her that the swaying of the railroad coach, with its monotonous cadence, still continued.

Robert had tenderly respected this semi-torpor, finding her, besides, infinitely graceful in this languishing condition; and as he incessantly analyzed all of his sensations, he was charmed with the test of the morning light, brightening, little by little, her tired visage. She could radiantly defy it. Despite her loosened hair and the disorder of her toilet, she was not less pretty. Robert remembered certain other mornings, after nights of mad dissipation, and how rudely the veil of his illusion had been torn away on gazing at the drawn, slightly-faded features of the creature whom he had adored but a few hours before, revealing all of their imperfections. Oh,

those accursed mornings, whose impressions remained so strongly with him, that forever afterward, no matter how adorned she might be when he chanced to meet her, he saw the woman whom he had loved as he had seen her then, disheveled, unkempt, unprepossessing.

But the fresh and healthy beauty of Marie-Ange could challenge these melancholy relapses and the painful scrutiny which would menace love itself. Even to the slight hollows which shadowed the eyes, and the somewhat lessened brightness of the complexion, every effect was becoming to her. And he felt that he had been relieved of a slight anxiety, more that of the observer than of the lover.

Very softly he placed his hand on that of Marie-Ange and said: "Here it is!"

She gave a start, at which both of them laughed, and then she gazed eagerly at the house before which the carriage had stopped. It seemed to her very fine, but immeasurably high.

Robert had nimbly descended, and had rung the bell at the carriage doorway; then he returned and helped her to alight. The door opened and they again found themselves in a semi-darkness. He had desired that at their first entrance to their home there should be none of the ridiculous embarrassments incident to an arrival at an unseasonable hour. He had not encumbered himself with baggage: he would send for it later at the station. A pretty picture, that of the man who counts his trunks and his bundles on the sidewalk, has business with the porters, holds a discussion with the coachman! No! for this moment, when they were to take possession of their common abode, he had thought only of devoting himself entirely to Marie-Ange.



Slightly abashed, she leaned upon his arm and he led her forward. He took her into the vestibule; here the stairway rose before them, and the brass carpet-rods glistened vaguely

in the general obscurity, hardly yet tinged with the morning glow.

He murmured in her ear:

“Now we are at home!”

They ascended some steps, amid the deep silence of the slumbering mansion, and they made so little noise that it was not in the least disturbed. Below them opened the gaping cage of the elevator, the net-work enclosing it mysteriously outlined in the dim light of the scarcely awakened day. They went very slowly, and he supported her tenderly with his arm about her.

When they were at the first story they stopped. He stole a little kiss upon her neck, which made her shiver.

“We will not hurry, will we? The moment has its charm. It is like a halt between the past and the future. Our domestic life has not yet begun; it will really date only from the moment when you shall have entered your home. Now we have only our sweet caresses to bind us. Then, a few steps, and it is marriage in earnest. My sweet little Marie-Ange, I am happy, very happy! And you?”

A boldness came upon her. She took Robert’s head in both her hands and kissed him.

Then, quizzing himself just a little, Robert said gaily:

“There, the little scene is very nice! And just a furtive gleam of the sun, impatiently anticipating his rights, piercing the window, at present, to lighten it. Now, then, forward!”

Boyishly, he almost lifted her from her feet, and they rapidly scaled the remaining flight, which divided them from their apartment. They entered.

“Madame,” said he, with a playful salute, “welcome to your hearth!—provided the abode pleases you. I hope at least they have properly executed my commands.”

Charmed, she looked curiously about, relishing the surprise of this pretty Parisian interior, over the fitting-up of which Robert had exchanged so many despatches with his

upholsterer, sent so many letters with explanatory designs, after having submitted his inspirations to Marie-Ange, who had always approved of them. Ah! how handsome he had been in the fever of conception over the arrangement of his fireside! And so serious, agitated by a thousand cares, like the general who is giving orders on every side at once.

This house in the Avenue de Messine was his own property; but he had hitherto occupied only an elegant bachelor's apartment in the fourth story. An apartment with which he was familiar in the second story had been vacant, and he had immediately caused it to be fitted up. Then he had remembered



certain coquettish furnishings, graceful knick-knacks which he had seen here and there, and he had caused them to be purchased and disposed according to his orders. A furious correspondence had taken place between Paris and the Isle of the Monks during those two weeks. He wanted everything to be ready upon the arrival of Marie-Ange, so that she should have neither trouble nor bustle, but be at once at her ease; and also that she might have a good opinion of his taste. Of course there remained a good many details which required her presence; necessitating pleasant errands to the stores,

standing guard at the Hotel Drouot,\* and explorations among the dealers in curiosities and antiquities. But the whole was already satisfactory, not at all common-place, and harmoniously cheerful.

Entirely awakened now, Marie-Ange uttered little cries of joy. The vestibule, hung with light-hued oriental stuff, over which were placed fantastic trophies of Persian arms, seemed charming to her. Emerging from great green plants contained in boxes of gilded faïence, strange Japanese monsters in bronze or poreclain, mounted guard with grinning lips. A window with large, colored panes, very soft in tone, lighted this coquettish ante-chamber, which struck one almost as a museum. The ceiling was lost behind a vast veil of some light tissue, which was neither hung nor nailed fast, but which was held at the four corners by thick silken cords. In one angle, as if to complete paradoxically the blending of all the known styles of art, a Russian icon, deprived of its glass envelope, displayed the finely carved silver out of which were formed the garments of a Virgin, holding the infant Jesus on her lap.

Marie-Ange's astonishment was a source of diversion to Robert. He opened a door and showed her into the dining-room with its high wood-work and its walls hung with old Cordova leather in washed-out tints. The panes were tinted in green. A lofty Renaissance cupboard and a Provençal sideboard relieved with their sombre background the beautiful, massive silver-plate which Captain Le Goëdic had brought out from the old family coffers, and which had been forwarded to Paris some days before. On the mantel rested a large enamelled clock with its pedestal. The chairs were of polished black leather, with silver nails. A few brasses, soberly disposed upon credences, shed the tawny reflection of their angular surfaces.

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\* The public auction mart in Paris.

"Are you an epicure?" asked Robert, laughing. "Does the room seem to you suitable for our first dinners alone?"

Then he stepped back and, lifting a tapestry hanging, showed her into the little parlor, entirely in the Louis XVI. style. Beyond this, through a wide opening from which the doors had been removed and replaced by a Japanese curtain, composed of slender threads of bamboo loaded with beads,—a somewhat bold contrast, yet with a cosy aspect,—was seen a large chamber, half studio, half smoking-den or office. But Robert, who was candid, did not dare employ this last word to designate it.

A vast fire-place, the sculptured wood-work of which formed an oval frame for a picture representing a hunting-scene, was the first object that met their gaze. It was furnished with tall iron fire-dogs, and on each side were placed two inviting Louis XIII. arm-chairs, covered with Utrecht velvet.



Three large windows, draped in the Italian manner, flooded with light,—it now being broad day—the demi-grand piano, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and covered with an ancient stole; two glass cases, of which one had been made out of a sedan chair, with panels delicately painted; an easel supporting a picture; a smaller picture; a revolving book-rack, containing a hundred volumes, tastefully bound; two little screens in rose-colored satin, brocaded from top to bottom with glass prisms; a writing-table; some tempting silken cushions; flower stands; and a great divan against one of the walls; all those articles of vertu that delight the eyes of the Parisian of

to-day shone here in charming confusion, a sort of skilful disorder avoiding the suggestion of too recent possession.

"Come, my dear;" and Robert drew Marie-Ange to him, and made her sit down beside him on the divan, while he looked at the whole with the eye of a connoisseur. Then he soberly explained the origin of each object, some of them having been already a long time in his possession, others having been accidentally discovered during his idle saunterings. These same saunterings had been more or less toilsome; people do not know how fatiguing a thing it is at times to be an idler! Thereupon he entered upon a theory of idleness, which might be practised as an art, but which required a special instinct, born and not acquired, or acquired with very great difficulty if at all. But she had the aptitude, and he felt that she would be a docile pupil. She listened to him curiously, clinging closely to him for warmth, and drinking in his words as they fell from his lips.

"Yes, Marie-Ange, in one week you will be an accomplished Parisian. I saw that you had it in you down there. But," Robert interrupted himself, "I am crazy to detain you here, and you have not yet seen everything. Why, there is your chamber!"

A few steps brought them to it. A large bed majestically filled the middle space, with columns hung with tapestry and lace. Through a crape shade, when the heavy curtains of old rose-colored velvet were parted, the light entered softly, and the entire room was toned with this same gentle hue. On an extension table, supported upon small pillars, a cup of Oiron faïence, with its rosy cheen, was filled with cut flowers, its elegant inlaid enamelling presenting upon its ivory-like surface figures in relief, shells and garlands. A little desk in lacquered wood, a Spanish cabinet, in two parts, with lozenge facets covered with a veneering of ivory painted in arabesques, a folding mirror, a great rug of white fur, attested less a de-

sire to adhere scrupulously to the style of an epoch than to unite great comfort with perfect taste.

"My chamber?" inquired Marie-Ange, after a delighted glance, with a little shade of uneasiness. "Why *my* chamber? And what of yourself, then?"

"Oh! myself? I shall be near to you, close at hand—here." And he opened a door, communicating with a room which was more soberly fitted up, somewhat like a bachelor's.

"Then —?" she said with a pretty pout.

Memories of her childhood came back to her; the great double bed of her parents, an enormous bed, where, when very small, she would lose herself when she ventured to get into it for an instant, "just for fun," while waiting to be dressed.

"My little darling," said Robert, "I love you too much to think of assuming any prerogatives. I wish to be put to the trouble of meriting your indulgent tenderness. Happiness that is too facile is no longer happiness. To be with you always, to impose myself upon you at all hours, not to spare your caprices—fie! I should have the air of a master, and there is nothing I fear more, Marie-Ange, than to resemble a husband who abuses his privileges and who esteems all things permissible to him. I intend that ours shall not be an ordinary domesticity, in which the sweetest things are spoiled by habit. No, I have an ambition to preserve not only your love, but your respect. You will understand all of that later. You will approve of my having been a little bit stoical at this moment. Do you wish for just one assurance, my darling? I adore you!"

So many tremors had affected Marie-Ange of late, that she no longer had either strength or force of will. A certain surprise came to her, however, with the almost grave and respectful tone which Robert assumed in this chamber, the very cosiness of which seemed to her most suited to the freest outpourings of the heart. But she compelled herself not to



reason further, not to try to understand what was taking place. She felt a certain fear also lest she should show herself too unsophisticated for this Paris in which she was to live.

"You know full well, Robert," said she, softly, "that I must place my whole reliance upon you."

Besides, an extreme lassitude, succeeding the over-excitement of the morning, had seized upon her; and in this great physical weariness, which she thought rather foolish, she perceived the delicacy of Robert, who consented to leave her to herself at the moment when the brutal need of repose dominated all else within her. She had also a kind of longing to review with closed eyes her intense, rapid, multiple sensations, a longing in which those sensations were drowned in an indefinable languor.



## IX.

For a surety, Robert had been right in predicting that Marie-Ange's Parisian education would be quickly accomplished, as if by miracle. She had thrown herself with a sort of fervor, these first days, into the assimilation of her existence with the novel things which she found about her. Robert was delighted with his rôle of absolute initiator, moulding according to his will this spirit which was so entirely at his disposal. He had had, while in Brittany, a sort of presentiment of this complicated pleasure. Had he espoused a young woman of the social circle in which he moved, she would have come to him with ready-made ideas, a routine of habits, perhaps a certain antagonism, open or latent, and some degree of experience. She would have preserved certain traces of prejudice. He experienced a singular joy in fashioning Marie-Ange to his liking, while she trusted in him with unreserved confidence, having not a single personal acquaintance from whom she could receive any alien suggestions. In his hands she had been marvellously apt in imitation, in appropriating his ideas as her own, even when they were insensate; no prejudices, no preconceived objections opposing the bent that he chose to give to her mind, no remnant of maternal education—since Madame Le Goëdic had died when she was very little—awakening her distrust. She was not even tempted to dispute anything. All that pleased Robert pleased her. She was completely at his discretion. Where, if not in that out-of-the-way country down there, could he have found so charm-

ing, so perfectly docile a being, whose intelligence would develop so brightly, who, at the same time, preserved her personal character, even in the transformation which she underwent, and in whom it seemed to him that he had found another self, so well did she understand him.

She grew more and more polished, and showed a very judicious taste, an assured instinct, and perfect tact. And for a moment, almost ashamed, in the midst of his search for new sensations, of such downright happiness, he simply adored her. Her beauty had a little bright blossom of originality, a gentle flavor of shyness—ah! such a delicate, pretty shyness!—which delighted him with the impossibility of all commonplace comparison in the circles into which he introduced her. He voluntarily gave himself a species of disquietude whenever he went with her to public places, to the theatre, to a restaurant, or elsewhere—for he exposed her to the full glare of publicity—of looking around to see if he could find some face which had a vague resemblance to hers, or an accentuation more seductive in its strangeness. Then, his scrutiny having ended fortunately in a negative conclusion, he breathed again, and he felt more than ever smitten with fondness for Marie-Ange, experiencing the full pride of possession as he gazed upon her. Of possession? No, of invention; and, indeed, he was pleased to repeat it to himself that he had “invented” her. Had she not formerly been unacquainted with herself? And what Parisian in his place would have thought of going to a Morbihanian isle to fall in love with her?

Robert had decreed a period of solitude for them both for what he called Marie-Ange’s “furbishing-up,” during which, their arrival at Paris being still unknown, he would impart instruction to her. And singular were the discourses that he gave her on the thousand points of Parisian gossip, the knowledge of which is indispensable, and which constitute as a whole the free-masonry of society. Robert pointed out the faces that one must be able to name, informed her of certain

recognized illegitimate alliances, took care to moderate the too ready admiration of noted personages which she expressed, hastening to show the reverse of the medal; and with an amiable scepticism unveiled the other side of the comedy of life which is being incessantly played. At first she was a little shocked. She shook her head, and refused to admit all that he told her; then, her astonishment gradually abating, she laughed at these revelations, and became emboldened so far as to ask judicious questions.

One day she mentioned casually a recollection of the convent, telling him of an ecclesiastic who made profession of the fine arts, and who "directed the reading" of the scholars, according to his own expression. Much diverted by this relation, Robert made her read novel after novel of that kind which it is necessary to have read, because of the world of ideas that they open up, and of the intellectual communion that they establish between mind and mind. He had the good taste to put only artistic books in her hands, books which were exquisite in style; for he detested everything of the common sort. He made merry over her surprises in the pell-mell of all these suggestive lessons of life, and, folding his arms like a priest, would say, with playful unction:

"Well, my daughter, are you edified?"

And Marie-Ange, with a little hypocritical pout, would lay down the volume, and respond gaily, in the same tone:

"Yes, your Reverence."

They experienced a sort of curiosity in the consciousness that they were growing more and more enamored of each other, that there were subtle affinities manifesting themselves little by little between them, and that their fondness began, so to speak, to have a personality and an originality.

It was under these circumstances that a letter arrived from good Captain Le Goëdic, written at some port of the Indian Ocean. So simple-hearted was he, that he sought to console Marie-Ange for his absence. And Marie-Ange, upon

reading it, felt somewhat ashamed that for a whole month she had thought so little of the old mariner.

But this letter served, as it were, to remind them of the social proprieties. The cards announcing their marriage had been out a long time. They must resign themselves to the making of certain necessary wedding calls, however uninteresting they might be; for they were not always, indeed, to live like savages. It cost them something, however, to give up the sort of secrecy which had enveloped the first days of their married life, the illusion that it was all a charming amour, the sequel of an abduction.

They made up their minds, however, and again became serious; they conscientiously established an itinerary of calls for one week.

They entered a carriage, one bright afternoon, and gave an address to the coachman. But, in proportion as they neared the end of the drive, they felt a sort of cowardice, a desire to postpone once more the tedious tasks of social observance.

The carriage first stopped in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, whither they had caused themselves to be driven. They hesitated a moment before alighting.

"Come!" said Robert, finally, "courage!"

They entered the stairway, mounted the first flight, and then suddenly they remembered their arrival in Paris from Brittany, that slow ascent of their own stairway by the light of the dawn, the kisses exchanged on the landings, the voluntary delay in front of their door. Instinctively they looked furtively about them, amused at the solemnity of the formal part which they were about to play, at this mock reassumption of their former decorum. Robert leaned upon Marie-Ange's shoulder, and she gave a little gesture of alarm upon hearing a noise in the upper stories.

"Well," she said, "shall we ring?"

The forbidding prospect of a ceremonious reception, of a conventional exchange of compliments, of a commonplace

interview, suddenly chilled them. They must have the air of a newly-married couple, already somewhat settled, yet not too much so, not to be taxed with an affectation of reason; and they would, of course, be watched in their least gestures and in every intonation, with that specially sympathetic indulgence, blent with a little raillery, that is extended to people who are newly married.

Robert was already extending his hand towards the button of the electric bell.

"Ah, no!" said he, "not yet!"

And they treated themselves to the joy of escaping, of fleeing from constraint, of again regaining their liberty. Merry as scholars who taste the delights of truancy, they drove to the Bois.

"Ah!" cried Robert, "I breathe once more! Everything that has the look of an obligation in marriage affrights me. This sort of official recognition, of ratification asked of society, of examination passed before it—brrr! as if we were to be enrolled in a special caste. 'Good!' society appears to say, 'I am forewarned; I shall keep an eye on you!' Oh! always this same solemnity about marriage! Civilization takes great pains—does it not?—to make love a penance."

"Ah!" said Marie-Ange, leaning upon his shoulder, "we are not yet arrived at that point, are we?"



## X.

ERTAINLY the comprehension of Marie-Ange regarding matters which Robert hardly allowed her to divine was remarkable. And this strange facility of assimilation greatly astonished him.

It was not only the docility and even the pleasure with which she bent to his caprices, but she also made them hers and accepted

them on her own account with perfect readiness. And on finding her now so marvellously apt in comprehending everything, he again felt those longings for the abnormal, for the grotesque, which had often worked upon his idle brain. What did he desire? He did not know. But he wished for the unexpected, for the amusing, for the unusual, and he had at his disposal the best "partner" he could hope for, fashioned by himself, moulded to his liking, thinking now even as he did.

The mania for the artificial pursued him; and this sport of the brain, with which he amused himself paradoxically, became a sort of familiar with a perverse and stimulating attraction. He ceaselessly imagined himself in strange situations, followed out the episodes of these situations in thought, tasting delightedly at times of chimerical anxieties. It was, besides, an old-time habit with him.

For instance, if by some circumstance he had delayed dining, if he felt an acute hunger, it would occur to him to set out and wander at hazard about Paris, forcing himself to imagine that he had had nothing to eat, that he was subject to that

decent and cruel type of misery which, is unsuspected by the passer-by; that he knew nobody in this great, heedless city, that he was isolated in the midst of the throng. He walked quickly, straight before him; the dusk was falling, the street-lamps were being lighted; he felt his heart contract, seeing the night unfold its shadows, and he gave himself up to the tragic consciousness of the well-dressed vagabond, ashamed of his distress, who, shelterless, yet too proud to knock at the door of a nocturnal asylum, waits for the day to come that he may have the right to repose upon a bench. Ah! what a horrible thing it must be—nay *it was*—this aimless promenade! He gazed upon people at table on the terraces of the cafés, or through the open windows of the restaurants; saw them, chosing their bill of fare, with shakings of the head and epicurean vacillation in the presence of the waiter, who stood attentively caressing his mutton-chop whiskers with his hand. He smelled the odor of the kitchens, as he passed; he gazed on the ground with the mad hope that he might come across a piece of money which would save him.

From the boulevards with their elegant haunts he gained the populous quarters. He followed the workmen who were returning to their faubourgs, entering some cook-shop or low-priced eating-house where the pots with polished covers formed an appetizing display in the very room in which the tables were set. He read the list of special dishes written upon the slate at the door—how delightful to have seated himself as quietly as possible in one corner of one of those great popular halls, making music with knife and fork beside these toilers in blouses, while recalling derisively memories of social banquets and festive gallantries! No, not even this rude treat was possible. And he continued on his way, broken, crushed, finding a certain voluptuousness in the ferocious hunger which gnawed his vitals. Who knows! Some of these unknown beings whom he met in the street felt perhaps these same torments, these same terrors, in all



their real horror! Towards eleven o'clock or near midnight, he found himself in front of the gate at one of the stations of the octroi. He gazed at the road beyond it, stretching out as far as the eye could reach, after his lamentable journey through Paris. Then he laughed suddenly, called a hackney-



coach which happened to have strayed thereabouts, had himself rapidly driven to a nocturnal restaurant and, worn out by the walk, passing in review the pictures which he had seen, he supped

with much gusto, amusing himself by being exacting, capricious, and very difficult in his taste, ordering the most expensive dishes, and drinking the rarest wines.

Thus he enacted a comedy with himself. He outlined the scenes of a romance, finding an infinite pleasure in it, and esteeming the reading of books insipid when one can personally procure the emotions associated with their characters and can analyze their situations experimentally.

A mad wish grew upon him little by little to initiate Marie-Ange into these perversities of sensation, to create fictitious difficulties between them, in order to break the monotony of their simple existence and to give it piquancy.

He put some bounds, however, to these wanderings of his imagination. It was by a gradual impulsion that he had brought Marie-Ange's mind to accept them. He devoted himself to habituating her to the chimerical.

He loved her meanwhile very sincerely. This lovely and robust young nature, united to his own, filled him with transport. Certainly, he was far removed from satiety. Not his

senses, but his brain, had constant need of a new aliment. Coupled with the possession of that which he loved, he must have also a kind of suitable stage-setting.

He was wholly devoted to Marie-Ange; no other desire, no other image disturbed him. The excessive facility of their happiness was the only thing that annoyed him.

He was domestic, after his fashion. He sometimes dismissed all of the servants, not without laborious planning, in order to remain wholly master of the house; for from his middle-class education he still retained a certain human respect for considerations of order and propriety. Then, with a thousand coaxing caresses, he would persuade Marie-Ange to give herself up to the perpetration of singular comedies. First astonished, then amused, and finally with a voluptuous thrill, she would fall into his vein. He would close the blinds and curtains; a night-lamp under a rose-tinted globe lighted the chamber where Marie-Ange, recumbent, clothed in a long, white garment which enveloped her neck and shoulders in a snowy mass of laces, feigned sickness, gently lamenting in a doleful voice, and playing her part artistically. Robert sat beside her, attending her most carefully, affecting a feeling of deep anxiety and making her, every quarter of an hour, drink a drop of cordial in a teaspoonful of water. She



allowed her head to fall back upon her pillow, as if with lassitude, and he would kneel down beside her, murmuring sweet words in her ear, conjuring her to summon up her courage and triumph over the imaginary ailment; or again, as if to

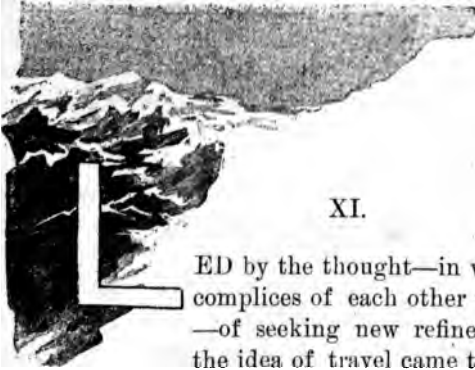
stifle a sob or to hide a tear, he would go to the window for a moment and press his forehead against the pane, or pass into the neighboring room. And he really was surprised to find that his eyes were moist.

Ah! the anguish of interminable hours in the sick-room, in silence and semi-darkness! The closed blinds deadened the sounds of the busy street out in the broad daylight; and he tasted of the sweet sadness of apprehension at the pillow of the loved one. It seemed to him that he was really on the point of losing her, and he clung to her desperately, kissing her dear, snow-white hands (toilet powder), finding her so lovely in the mysterious and flickering glow of the night-lamp, which cast moving shadows upon the curtains.

Then he approached her, as if for a farewell embrace, covered her with caresses, and, with his lips meeting hers, in the illusion of a near and fatal separation, clasped her to his heart.

And on these days, when they were quite alone in the house, their joy was more complete, if the bell chanced to ring, the strokes becoming little by little impatient and furious. They liked to fancy that they were in hiding, to move about more softly, to cease their talk suddenly, to be absolutely silent until the moment when they heard the vexed visitor descend the stairway, watching him afterwards with many precautions through the barely turned blinds, that they might identify him.

In the street and in society, which they now began to enter, they addressed each other in familiar terms; but at home, the more formal language seemed to them to create a delightful semblance of constraint which they must overcome, erecting an obstacle to their entire surrender to each other. And their caresses were only the finer flavored with the apparent coldness of their spoken intercourse.



## XI.

LED by the thought—in which they were accomplices of each other without avowing it—of seeking new refinements of pleasure, the idea of travel came to them one morn-

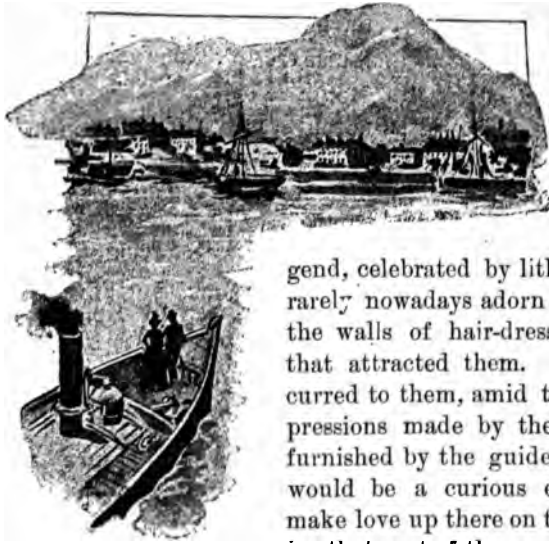
ing, though not with the wish to see other lands.

They started as chance directed, and it led them into Switzerland. They alighted at Geneva, shut themselves up in a hotel, and experienced in their isolation the wished-for sensation—that of fugitive lovers. From the window Robert had perceived a landau passing along the quay, in which were seated a family whom he knew, and he indulged himself in the pleasure of imagining that he was compelled to remain in concealment. They spent three days there in their chamber, never leaving it, taking their repasts on a miniature table, gazing at the gulls flying in noisy cohorts over the lake, and the steamboats which passed between the jetties, beating the blue water with their wheels, depositing legions of tourists on the quay in outlandish accoutrements; and they amused themselves by gazing at these nomads and studying their ugliness. For humanity, which is nowhere beautiful, seems particularly disagreeable when travelling. They enjoyed the certainty of having concealed themselves beyond the ken of search, even beyond the reach of tidings; for they had set out without saying whither they were going. Marie-Ange began, through a

close community of sensations, to enjoy so much the perturbing charm of this fictitious existence, that she had no wish to go out. She, too, became absorbed in her part.

The statue of Rousseau on its narrow isle, immediately before their windows, gave them a sort of sudden, nervous revolt at its absurd conventional attitude, and they felt the necessity of movement. The whistling of steam-craft constantly in their ears was, besides, an invitation.

A guide-book lay upon the table; they ran through it at



hazard; the excursion to the venerable Mt. Saint-Bernard tempted them. It was not indeed the le-

gend, celebrated by lithographs that rarely nowadays adorn anything but the walls of hair-dressers' parlors, that attracted them. It merely occurred to them, amid the vague impressions made by the information furnished by the guide-book, that it would be a curious experience to make love up there on the mountain, in that out-of-the-way monastery;

the dark forms of priests passing and repassing in the grand outer corridors while they were exchanging their kisses in the shadows of the cloister. The hospitable monks, it seemed to them, according to tradition, must needs be austere consolers, recluses disdainful of the world, and the desire to taste profane joys in this sacred asylum haunted them.

They took the boat. The romantic shore of Savoy glided

before them until they reached the frontier village of St. Gingolph, so oddly cut in two geographically, at the base of the lofty mountains which care not for human conventions. On descending into the saloon of the boat, they were amused by the persistency of Protestant proselytism, which employs every available means under the sun to the ends which it has in view, even to placing upon the breakfast table various little black-covered volumes, entitled: "Evangelical Gleanings," or "Christian Examples," which the unsophisticated trustfully take for the wine-list.

The steamboat, cleaving the water, its wheels still quivering with the last impulses of the engine, glided up alongside the wharf at Bouveret.

A Swiss railroad train, with uncomfortable coaches, severely protective of good morals, was waiting at the terminus. They became conscious, after the first stations had been passed, that they were in a Catholic country. Picturesque churches piled up on gigantic rocks succeeded the heavy façades of the temples on the other side of the lake, and, in anticipation, they tasted the perverse joy of mad caresses, exchanged in the seclusion of the monastery to which they were bound.

Leaving behind them gloomy St. Maurice, they arrived at Martigny, where a driver offered them his services. They got into his rickety little carriage, and after hours of frightful jolting they reached the village of Bourg-Saint-Pierre, and the inn of the "Déjeuner de Napoleon" (Breakfast of Napoleon), situated in a mean little lane among enormous wooden barns, built upon posts. They felt greatly fatigued, and remained perfectly indifferent to the recitals of their host, who insisted upon showing them the table at which the great man had despatched an omelette while creating an unheard-of route through the mountains.

Then they set forth again, this time on mule-back. Their guide was a big, stout, squarely-built fellow, who had prudently supplied himself—himself only—with an immense wal-

let, into which he had crammed all sorts of provender. This he drew upon incessantly, gnawing crusts of bread while he led the enormous reddish-brown beast ridden by Marie-Ange, whose hard gait caused her to utter little screams of terror.

Robert made him talk.

"What is your name, my good man?"

"Jean Gaidoz, a true son of the mountain, sir, as God sees us!"

And to pass the time away, as the two young folks continued to question him, he recounted his rude, difficult, and laborious life. Children to feed, too, who were always crying with hunger.

"How many?"

"Three."

And Jean Gaidoz resumed his sketch of the miseries of his existence, portraying—while continually drawing more victuals from the inexhaustible wallet—the sad winter evenings spent before the scanty fire, incapable of warming the half-frozen family; the groans of the *four* children; the complaints of the housewife; the house buried underneath the snow; work impossible.

Ah! the *five* poor little brats had no cause to thank their parents for their existence! The honest mountaineer recited all this as if by rote; at each detail adding to the number of his children in order to render his case more pitiable. In the end, he had *seven* of them. Who knows where he would have stopped if Marie-Ange had not interrupted him to have him tighten her saddle-girth, which was insecure?

Soon the "true child of the mountain" seemed to lag somewhat in his gait, asked a moment's respite, then declared that he had just risen from a malady, and feigning to be hardly able to drag himself along, he asked suddenly for permission to ride "for a mile or two" on Robert's mule.

"Surely, my friend!" said Robert, gaily, with a fine philosophy; for he had already heard of the energy and courage of

the Saint-Bernard guides. And, amused by the situation, he climbed the route on foot, while the mule which he had hired served its master, who established himself comfortably on its back.

"Would you like me to hold the bridle," asked Robert with a pleasant irony.

"Thanks, Monsieur," responded the guide, gravely, "it is hardly worth while."

They had reached the elevation where the line of snow begins. Robert laughed until the tears came at the strategem of the man, and found him very sensible not to run the risk of wetting his feet.

A mean-looking structure suddenly loomed up into view at the point where all appearance of a roadway came to an end.

"Maybe Monsieur and Madame would like to refresh themselves," said Jean Gaidoz, "while I go and telephone to the Refuge?"

"Eh?" cried Robert, astounded at the word. He thought it a joke of the guide.

But the latter had jumped to the ground and entered the house. Robert, who followed, saw him quietly approach an apparatus which was installed in a corner.

"Hello ! hello !" he cried.

Greatly disappointed in his hope of receiving poetic impressions, Robert discovered that this nondescript inn, called the Cantine of Proz, had really been connected with the convent by telephone for a year or two. This detail inspired him with some fear as to the picturesqueness of the experience which awaited them above.

When Jean Gaidoz had received the reply that the passage of the last defile in the mountains presented no danger, which seemed particularly agreeable to him, the travellers again set forth. Assuming a swaggering air, the guide now complacently showed them the places where noted tourists had per-

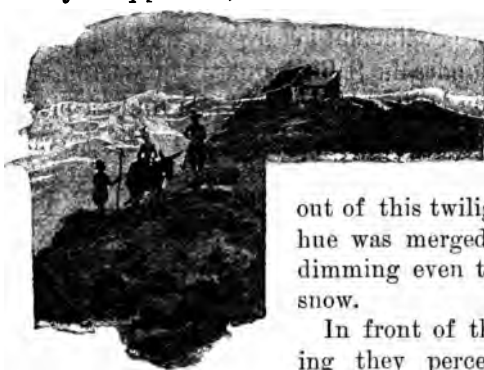


ished. It is always flattering to feel that one is running a risk.

After two hours of painful ascent along the verge of ugly-looking precipices, the massive outline of the Refuge at length appeared on the horizon.

This time Robert and Marie-Ange met with no vexatious surprise. It was just like this, standing out mournfully and almost tragically against the white background of snow, that they had imagined the convent, reminding one of so many dramas.

"So much for the telephone !" said Robert. "We are not wholly disappointed, all the same."



The sun was sinking in a pallid sky, faintly marked by a rosy zone. A deep melancholy grew

out of this twilight, in which every hue was merged into a dull gray, dimming even the whiteness of the snow.

In front of the principal building they perceived another low structure, access to which was had by a short flight of steps; then a very small stuccoed edifice, the window of which was closed by a wooden blind.

"That," said Jean Gaidoz, "is the Morgue."

"Bless me !" cried Robert, "this is local color, indeed." And he thought of the poor lost travellers, dying of cold and hunger, to whose succor the legendary dogs had come too late.

Meanwhile, they had arrived. Whistling, the guide preceded them by some paces. They ascended the stone steps of the stairway of the Refuge, not without a slight emotion. They heard Jean Gaidoz ring a little massive bronze bell to

announce their arrival. They followed him, and suddenly they were unable to repress a cry of surprise.

They found themselves in a veritable hotel vestibule, elegant, comfortable, and characterless. On the walls were fastened illustrated railroad and steamboat posters, with the eternal packing-boat crossing blue lake in the middle, surrounded by mountains, to which chromo-lithography has thus far been able to give but the vaguest tints. In one corner there was a letter-box with the traditional inscription in three languages. Nothing austere, nothing monastic: it was something like the hallway of a small casino. Only a number of portraits of Napoleon hung over the doors, and at one end a Latin inscription recalled the memory of the march of the French troops.

Robert and Marie-Ange looked at each other in some vexation. They had hoped for a romantic impression, and the first glimpse which they had had of the Refuge was that of the interior of a well-kept inn.

"The Father who bears the keys is coming," said the guide, Jean Gaidoz.

A young priest with rosy, smiling visage appeared, a thin edging of white ornamenting the tippet of his costume. He bowed easily and courteously to the travellers.

Robert had expected some form of monastic greeting.

"The best chambers are all taken," he said, with the tone of the obsequious hotel-keeper. "But—give me an instant: we will try to arrange matters as well as we can."

He left them after another salutation, very worldly in manner, and disappeared in the great corridor which was lined with numbered doors. In proportion as the reality became manifest, Robert felt himself losing countenance. He had dreamed of some amusing hypocrisy, in order to preserve a certain novel piquancy under the suspicious watch of these recluses, a violent contest between the youthful loves of himself and Marie-Ange and the austerity of these monks;

and, not knowing exactly how, he had hoped to enjoy the illusion of certain obstacles, or at least of certain difficulties to be overcome, in order to see and talk with his wife during their sojourn in the convent.

At La Chartreuse, which he had once visited, was not the rule imposed that the men should be received in one part, the women in another?

But the Father who bore the keys returned with a bunch of them in his hand.

"In sooth," said he, "I had forgotten that No. 7 is vacant. If you will be so kind as to follow me—"

What! Together! They were not even to be separated, then! They were to be given the same chamber; not the least mortification, not the least sacrifice demanded of them! It was not even exacted of them, as in other hotels, that they should give their names and quality. The priest was not alarmed that the portrait of Saint Bernard de Menthon, which hung in the chamber, might witness their affection, and it was a discreet hospitality, that which he proffered then in the name of his order.

They gaily made the best of this prosy downfall of their romantic chimeras.

"Ah!" said the young priest on withdrawing, "dinner is at seven."

Robert thought of the disappointment of the poor sinner, bearing the heart-weight of some transgression, who should come hither with the poignant desire of confession and expiation, to cast himself at the feet of the monks who dwell so far from the world, on finding himself welcomed as a common tourist with polite, though indifferent, kindness:

"Dinner is at seven."

The chamber was vast, if not very commodious; and if the furniture was not elegant, there was at least nothing lacking. A stove of very modern type, and which certainly had not warmed any pilgrim in the past epochs of easy faith, occupied

— with its many complicated funnels—a place in front of the closed fireplace. A tcilet-table, presenting all the desirable accessories, chairs and easy-chairs, a carpet which represented a fox carrying off a hen, completed the furniture. But along the whole length of the walls Napoleon appeared again—in engravings, in lithographs, in prints of all sorts—to the prejudice of Saint-Bernard himself, who no longer seemed to figure at all as the patron of the place.

On horseback, pointing with his finger to a redoubt to be taken; in civic dress, with his hands behind his back; in a gray riding-coat, beside a bivouac fire; or in the splendor of imperial pomp, holding the sceptre—there he was, everywhere, inevitable, wherever the eyes chanced to fall. If it was the great man himself who had sent to the monks these multiple portraits, then his gratitude was certainly of the cumbersome sort. A bell rang. Robert and Marie-Ange, not daring to anticipate any further surprise, entered the dining-room, identical with those of



Swiss hotels generally; the well-served table being arranged in the form of a horse-shoe, and ornamented with dishes of stewed prunes. And yet, although they were henceforth in a manner acclimated, they could not repress their astonishment upon seeing a piano, still open, and upon reading on the music-rest the title of a waltz. They were informed that the piano was a gift of the Prince of Wales, and that it was apparently appreciated, too, in a very different manner from a religious picture which had been sent by Frederick III., then the hereditary Prince of Germany, after an excursion to Mt. Saint-Bernard.

There were some fifteen persons at table, among whom Italians predominated; noisy, exuberant, readily forming acquaintances with their neighbors, and narrating astonishing feats of ascension.

Little amused by this loquacity, Robert and Marie-Ange made their exit; but as they descended the steps of the porch, a savage barking was heard.

"Do not provoke the dogs," said a servant; "they are not always agreeable."

What! those renowned dogs, those patterns of all the animal virtues, were they also a myth? Robert and Marie-Ange in fact, saw before them, displaying his fangs, a monster of



ferocious aspect, who may have had an infinite regard for the welfare of travellers lost in the snow, but who seemed certainly to testify a perceptible degree of hostility towards others.

At least, the splendor of the night, with this fairy-like setting of snowy mountains deriving a bluish tint from the light of the moon, enraptured them. It cast luminous trails across the horrid depths of the sombre gorges, it vividly outlined the forms of the rocks, it hollowed mysterious and tempting abysses, and at the end of the little lake, extending to the foot of the convent, it danced upon the surface of the limpid waters. And in the atmosphere, which was exquisitely pure, in the midst of the great silence, indefinable noises were

heard like a supernatural music. Ah ! doubtless a procession of white fairies and genii were about to appear, borne through the radiant night upon the ray of a star. A deep poetic feeling enveloped them.

But the cold, which was very sharp, recalled them to the reality, and still under the influence of the scene, they returned slowly and with reluctant steps to the convent. And for the first time, perhaps, Robert, awed by the majestic serenity of nature, felt, despite himself, grave and tranquil



words of love springing to his lips. And Marie-Ange leaned upon his shoulder, serious, too, trembling with emotion and yielding to the momentary charm.

But they returned to the drawing-room ; and the trite accents of a waltz played at the piano caused the perturbing beauty of this dream to vanish quite away. The Italians were now dancing under the indulgent eye of a monk, who was sipping his coffee while chatting with a Swiss savant about the flora of the Alps, the gilded bows of his spectacles hidden in his grayish-blond locks. Assuredly, Saint-Bernard had never foreseen a picture such as this !

An irritation seized them from that moment. For an instant they fingered the registers in which successive tourists had inscribed their ridiculous inspirations, giving not a very fa-

mous idea of humanity, six thousand feet above the sea; and, almost angrily, they withdrew to their chamber, eager to quit this disappointing roof, so deplorably modernized.

It was only as a matter of conscience that they visited on the following day the library, the tomb of Desaix, beside which they found the box for contributions, and the Morgue.

A horrible vision was that of the corpses fixed upon a plank, enveloped in sheets, their grinning heads uncovered, and decaying little by little in the dry atmosphere, falling in fragments upon a litter of bones. A tall old man, with a white beard contrasting with his dark face, overtopped the rest, a tragic skeleton which seemed the image of death itself looming up behind him.

Robert had led Marie-Ange to one side, and, as he could not suppress an exclamation of disgust, the monk, thinking it an interrogation, complacently vaunted the curious nature of the spectacle, with an air as if offering excuses for the fact that accidents were not more frequent, and that the last corpse dated so far back as three years before.

An instant afterward, Jean Gaidoz, who had been missing since the previous evening, suddenly reappeared, still complaining, still maudlin, still groaning and munching his eternal morsel of bread. And, in weather that had suddenly become overcast, a fog hiding the horizon, they went down the mountain.



## XII.

DOUBTLESS this abortive excursion left with Robert and Marie-Ange a certain feeling of vexation. A desire to return to Paris, however, did not occur to them. They were exploring one day, in a listless manner, the shores of the lake from Villeneuve to Lausanne, when they paused in a quiet nook which forms a sort of dependence of Vevay, after one has traversed the little narrow street which ends with the town, itself so calm, yet possessing a certain monotonous

movement peculiar to Swiss resorts. A large house of a somewhat gloomy aspect, resembling both a convent and a barrack, with a terrace which was prettily set off with flowers, and which extended to the margin of the lake, attracted their attention. On a bench, an aged English lady was reading a volume, bound in black, which desperately resembled a Bible. Near her, a young man of rather elegant appearance, his face showing the ravages of consumption, watched with an air of melancholy the lateen-rigged craft which were gliding across the waters in the distance. He had let fall upon his knees, together with the book he had been reading, the *Journal de Genève*, whose title in severe characters stood out in relief.



In the garden, two or three women, solemn, frigid, stilted, and ugly, were promenading; and from the street one could see that they were automatically accomplishing the same exercise, each one placing her footsteps, round after round, exactly as she had done before.

"Good Heavens! how tiresome it must be here!" exclaimed Marie-Ange.

"Ah, who knows?" said Robert, always haunted by a cer-



tain perversity of sentiment and to whom an idea had suddenly occurred. He at once proceeded to unfold it to the young woman, who at first smilingly resisted and ventured some objections; but, then, being tempted herself, at length consented, only stipulating that the ordeal should not be too long.

"Oh, only a few days!" cried Robert; "but with such irksomeness all about us, we can have such a lark!"

They had quickly come to comprehend each other, their impressions and impulses now blending as one. They agreed not to seem to know each other, and to present themselves separately at the hotel, on the balcony of which were displayed these two words in gray letters—gray like the rest of the stage setting—"Pension Martinet."

They returned to Vevay to get their baggage. Marie-Ange took a carriage and was driven to the hotel alone.

Monsieur Martinet, a stout man, beardless and very bald, whose face vaguely suggested a chess-pawn and an unfrocked priest, examined her suspiciously, as if there were too much

elegance about her, being a woman of so much beauty, and questioned her at length, with the tone of a judicial inquisitor. But Marie-Ange, despite her light-colored toilet and her large hat trimmed with flowers, had assumed an air which was altogether modest and reserved, and the examination for admission to the mournful hostelry was, on the whole, favorable to her.

Now that Robert was no longer near her to lead her into a thousand follies, she lost a little of her assurance and readily resumed her natural simplicity. She had, for a moment, a shrinking of the heart when she found herself installed alone in an immense chamber, scrupulously clean but dreadfully dreary, with its tall furniture in the style of the Empire, suggestive of diabolical forms. And though, through the open window, she perceived before her, stretching out beyond the ken of sight, gay vineyards climbing far up on the sides of the mountains, she felt a strong desire to weep, as if her voluntary isolation were really abandonment.

Besides, if, through the influence that he exercised over her, her husband had succeeded in intoxicating her with the perfidious charm of sensational imaginings, and had caused her to find pleasure in them, and to feel a need of them, she was not without a certain misgiving when reason momentarily returned to her. Would not the most commonplace happiness have been worth more than this complicated pleasure, obtained by such ingenious efforts? Were these perpetual pranks really all that she had dreamed of in the past, and was it not dangerous thus to prolong them? She vaguely felt that the end of this extraordinary agitation of the brain, this constant seeking of the grotesque and the unreal, was destined to be ridiculous, vexatious, and melancholy.

She saw herself again in the little house at the Point, so full of homely charm, at the moment when she first met Robert. She felt, too, a sense of shame that she had been so long oblivious of her father, the worthy captain who was wan-

dering about the world, and who, she was sure, thought of her always while directing the manœuvres of his vessel.

Seated upon an immense sofa, covered with green rep, without even removing her hat, she indulged in these reflections, feeling a swelling of the heart, without knowing exactly why, and thinking that she would ask Robert to become more sedate, to love her after a different fashion, with just the least bit of respect. She experienced a kind of shame that their love had been thus profaned. Yes, the moment that she saw Robert again, she would tell him all this.

She had not taken account of the flight of time, lost as she was in revery, and the dinner-bell recalled her to herself.

She descended to the dining-hall almost reluctantly, for it had been agreed that they should live like the rest of the inmates of the hotel. She seated herself at the place indicated to her, in front of which, just beside the plate, lay a napkin-ring, bearing a number. She was one of the first to arrive. Shadows glided one by one around the long table, with an exchange of salutations, as if it were a sick chamber. Chairs were moved discreetly, and without noise, and without a word being spoken. She recognized, by an access of coughing which he had, and which echoed ominously through the large room, the consumptive whom she had seen in the morning. Glances were directed toward him, not without a certain severity.

Marie-Ange was beginning to feel some disquietude when the door opened and Robert appeared with a dignified manner. In that sombre setting, his triumphant youth, his splendid audacity, his air of assurance, his Parisian grace were so well relieved that she was charmed with him. He exchanged with her a quick glance, full of wicked gaiety; and suddenly her dismal thoughts vanished and she felt herself yielding again. She experienced a keener joy upon seeing him again than she had believed to be possible, knowing that she was his—and she adored him. She felt a sense of pity for all these lugubrious

beings; for their earth-to-earth existence, for the restraint which they imposed upon themselves, for their frigid attitude; and she could not help but agree with him that these extravagances of the imagination were, after all, the truest reason. Yes, it would be delightful to bid defiance to all these forbidding faces, and their love would seem so much better in contrast with such irksomeness.

Robert found himself opposite to her, between the English woman (she of the Bible) and a Russian with a besotted air, a light-haired old man, who seemed to be lost in a brown study, but who, in reality, did not think at all, dragging out his existence, for years past, from hotel to hotel. He was almost the only one who drank wine, and the bottle which was placed in front of him cast a sombre stain upon the board, amid the multitude of water decanters. The meal was served noiselessly. Lean, dried-up chamber-maids, with hard features, assisted the head waiter, who was a rosy-visaged German, with locks laboriously plastered down upon his forehead by the aid of cosmetics which diffused an insipid odor around him.

Conversations were meanwhile begun in low tones. Marie-Ange felt that she was the object of them. She was examined with something of hostility; and Robert gravely amused himself by questioning his neighbor about her, evoking in reply only a scandalized shake of the head. They glanced at each other furtively at times, pretending immediately afterwards to take an interest in what was going on about them.

The dinner was rapidly disposed of. The shadows again glided noiselessly about the long table and then disappeared, and the Russian remained alone, the waiter having served him a cup of coffee.

Marie-Ange entered the drawing-room. Around the circular table, covered with a flower-decked cloth, three or four ladies were disputing, with morose politeness, the possession of some edifying Protestant publications. In a corner, on a

sofa, an old gentleman was already slumbering devoutly. Elsewhere, a worthy couple had commenced a game of backgammon; while near the piano, at which a young man with gold spectacles was pretentiously striking some chords, one



of those eternal English nomads of the female sex, who have never known any other interior than that of the typical cosmopolitan boarding-house, drew from a bag

embroidered in staring colors, and which apparently contained within its ample depths a perfect world of articles, a number of letters written upon transparent paper, and with the lines running in every direction. These she complacently re-read.

Robert entered in his turn, fingering for a moment, with apparent indifference, a steamboat time-table; then, little by little, under a battery of suspicious glances, drew near to Marie-Ange, and, as if to break the ice, offered her an illustrated journal.

She thanked him, with a pretty gesture; and as if it had been, indeed, their first meeting, they exchanged some commonplace words, which every one might hear. "Charming country—so picturesque! By what magic of the sunset, just now, had the Savoy mountains been lost to view! One could not help loving Switzerland!"

They felt that they were watched, and the ceremonious tone in which they spoke became more emphatic, despite their desire to laugh. They found a delightful pleasure in the comedy they were playing, in the constant watch which they imposed upon themselves; while, by the glances that kindled in their eyes, they audaciously belied their own

hypocritical attitude. This dissimulation seemed to them exquisite; it revived the intensest ardor of their love. They felt an insane desire to embrace each other. Adjoining the drawing-room was a glass vestibule, the door of which, on this sultry evening, had been left open. The gas-jet threw its light upon the trees of the garden, which could be seen to tremble in the vivid glow. The night, too, was very dark.

Robert and Marie-Ange, advancing a few steps, approached this door, and they heard behind them a slight whispering. They were becoming a spectacle to all these good souls, who were devoured by the demon of dulness, and they were amused by the agitation which they caused. They ventured into the vestibule and seated themselves in the cane arm-chairs which they found there.

There was a deep silence, as by common accord, in the drawing-room. Ears were bent to catch a few words of their conversation. But, in order to shock the listeners, Robert, with his spirit of boyishness, forged outlandish syllables, as if he were talking in an unknown tongue. Then, in bravado, he offered his arm to Marie-Ange and led her off into the darkness, towards a shaded walk.

"You know I love you!" said Marie-Ange, leaning her head upon his shoulder.

"Hush!" said Robert; "they must be listening."

"Do you not think that we have had enough of this, now?—that we had better leave this gloomy place?"

"What, my darling! Why, the pleasure is hardly begun yet! It is so delightful to realize one's happiness amid such priggish surroundings."

"We are making a dreadful scandal."

"So much the better."

They thought that they perceived some one following them. They stopped talking, took a few further steps, and then returned towards the house. From a distance they recognized the ample form of Monsieur Martinet. Their host was

conversing with a group of his boarders, and, apparently, was justifying himself. He placed his hand upon his heart and then extended it, as if to call upon Heaven as a witness; and they caught certain words which attested that their promenade had given cause for alarm:

“Watchfulness—promise you—established good name of the house!”

At their approach, he withdrew rapidly, but not without a final declaration.

When Robert and Marie-Ange re-entered, there was reprobation in every eye. Who were these intruders, anyhow, whose excessive youth and elegance were so offensive, and who had come to this venerable hostelry to engage in an impudent flirtation? It was intolerable. The boarders ostentatiously kept aloof from Marie-Ange, and as she mechanically moved toward the piano, to read the title of the piece which lay on the music-rest, the pianist of the golden spectacles stopped abruptly, as if at the appearance of a demon.

It pleased Robert, in the meanwhile, to create imaginary obstructions between Marie-Ange and himself; he went and seated himself at the other end of the parlor and turned over the pages of Tschudi's “World of the Alps,” which is an essential part of the library of every Swiss hotel. He thought he had never before found his wife so handsome, or her beauty so tempting.

But, little by little, the inmates of the hotel retired. It struck ten; it was late for them, and whatever the curiosity the strangers excited, the virtuous habits of the others did not permit them to prolong the watch. Marie-Ange had a moment of fear. What! was she really to seek her chamber alone, and to fall again into the isolation of which she had had at her arrival so cruel an experience? A glance from Robert reminded her of all the delight to be derived from the wilful exasperation of the senses through the temporary separation which they had decreed for themselves. And she ascended to her apartment.

Robert, in order to sustain his part, remained a quarter of an hour longer. Once in his own room, he opened the window, lit a cigar, and leaned upon the guard-rail. The moon, which had long been hidden, now illumined the heights which formed the horizon. Still somewhat in shadow, however, it shed upon the vineyards only a feeble trail of milky splendor, the white walls standing out in sharp relief, like enigmatical lines, dividing the sombre masses.

But he saw nothing. He thought. He experienced the voluptuous pleasure of saying to himself that Marie-Ange was there, near at hand, and that, nevertheless, while he adored her, he kept apart from her. A pleasure very sweet and perverse! It had pleased him to taste of the anguish of ungratified desire, to place between them the abyss of night. Never had he cherished her so fondly, and it was of his own will that he had rendered it impossible to join her. It was the first time that he had left her thus, and, in the position in which he had placed himself, that of the lover who is compelled to submit to a provoking and harassing delay, he felt his whole heart bathed in tenderness.

There was no longer any movement in the hotel. Out of doors not a sound. He no longer knew the hour. With a refined voluptuousness he analyzed the genuine torture that he experienced, in not having Marie-Ange by his side. For he really suffered; he missed her cruelly. Had there been league upon league between them, he could not have been more disquieted, more restless. Marie-Ange appeared to him as at the most exciting moments, so tempting, with her long chestnut locks, which he liked her to unfasten, and which fell in floods upon her white shoulders, and over her snowy laces. There





was a charm in the poignant suspense of being so near to her, alone in the night, only a few steps away.

He was in a sort of fever. He was shaken by little chills. He told himself that he would not have believed it possible that he could have been so violently affected by an ordeal which he had sought as a connoisseur in rare and uncommon sensations. He paced the chamber restlessly, and the sound of his own footsteps stirred a strange commotion in his whole being. An exasperation seized him. He felt that he could not remain in that commonplace chamber, unable to sleep. And just then there came to him the idea of adding zest to the emotions which he had aroused in himself by the illusion of an amorous escapade. Why not? The caresses which he was about to seek, through the obstacles he had deliberately put in his way, would surely savor of clandestine love.

He rejected the thought at first, because of what there might be of vulgarity in its realization. But the romantic side of the surprise which he contemplated soon overcame every scruple. Would not this act be charmingly characteristic of youth and folly?

He gave himself the pleasure of a long resistance to temptation, not allowing himself to leave his chamber until after a certain fixed time. He desired to find Marie-Ange in a doze, that he might be obliged to hold a whispered parley with her through the closed door before she would recognize him; and he longed for unforeseen difficulties—he almost hoped that he might not succeed—so that he might taste the bitterness and the rage of disappointment.

At length, as quietly as possible, he ventured into the corridor, lighted by a single gas-jet which was turned low, and half groped his way down the stairs, watching lest some servant were on the alert. He arrived at the chamber of Marie-Ange. He tapped with his finger very gently, just above the door-knob, and murmured: “It is I!” No response. Then he called a little louder: “Marie-Ange!”

The noise of a moving chair told him that Marie-Ange was up and was approaching the door, and without opening yet, she exclaimed: "Is it you? Oh, how nice of you! I was dying of ennui!" She turned the key, and a stream of light filtered into the passage through the narrow aperture. Robert was about to enter, when suddenly he felt some one grasp him about the body.

Dumbfounded, pale with virtuous anger, the worthy Monsieur Martinet attempted to seize and hold him. He slept on the opposite side of the corridor and had heard footsteps. Modestly donning an enormous great-coat, and surcharged with suspicion, he had hastened to the spot.

The stout little man strove to detain Robert, and prudently-suppressed exclamations escaped from his lips. "What a scandal! And in my house! You are a satyr, sir!"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Robert, quickly disengaging himself. "You complete the adventure! Thanks!"

And he swiftly entered the chamber, shut the door in the face of the landlord, and, laughing aloud, locked it with a double turn.

The unfortunate Monsieur Martinet remained a moment dazed and riveted to the floor. He was beside himself. He imagined that he heard exclamations of remonstrance. He asked himself, in some perplexity, whether he ought not to summon aid. But just then there came a burst of laughter, broken with pauses that were remarkably like kisses, echoing again through the silence of the hotel, which now in every other part was wrapt in chastest slumber.



"Ah, the wretches!" said he, "they had arranged it all! And to choose my roof for such debauchery!"

His puritanism was offended; yet detained there, neverthe-

less, by a curiosity which was no longer of the most disinterested kind, he strained his ears. Then he made a pretence of going away, only to return, however, after removing his shoes, so as to make no noise, and to listen.

But Robert was not duped by this apparent retreat.

"Monsieur Martinet," cried he, assuming a terrible tone, by way of mockery, "if you do not take yourself off, I'll strangle you!"

Fearful, nervous, trembling, and fascinated, Marie-Ange clasped Robert in her arms, clung to him, scolded and thanked him by turns, dreaded a sort of siege on the part of Monsieur Martinet's aroused household, and felt, at the same time, the most delicious sensations from all these unforeseen emotions.

When the first streak of day appeared (they had hardly yet closed their eyes) they were awakened by the imperious voice of Monsieur Martinet.

"Monsieur! Monsieur! you must quit this chamber—at once—before any one is awake!"

For a moment they experienced the stupor which lovers feel when they find that they have forgotten themselves. Marie-Ange was somewhat ashamed, declaring that she could not again have courage enough to appear before their host.

Poor Monsieur Martinet became suppliant.

"Think of it! If any one were to know, my house would be ruined!"

"I'm coming," said Robert; and embracing Marie-Ange, he promised to arrange matters so that she would not have occasion to blush before the worthy man, who, on the contrary, he assured her, would treat her with the very greatest deference and respect.

He left the chamber. Monsieur Martinet was lifting his arms up to heaven, looking this way and that and seeming a prey to the greatest torture. What would people suppose, were they to find them in this situation?

"Come to my room," said Robert; "I have something to say to you."

The other, arranging his Madras kerchief, which had come undone, followed him, somewhat puzzled, but nevertheless resolved to maintain a severe countenance.

"My dear Monsieur Martinet," cried Robert, in an off-hand manner, while he lit a cigarette, "I owe you some explanation regarding what has occurred this night."

"Ah, sir, you are cynical."

"Not at all. I desire to reassure you as to my morality."

"Oh!" sighed Monsieur Martinet, incredulously.

"I have just left my *wife's* chamber, mine host, *my wife's*, do you understand?"



And with an assurance that, to himself, was most amusing, he at once unfolded a long and bewildering tale, complicating it as much as possible, in order to enjoy the amazement of his listener, discoursing of dissensions due to a misunderstanding, —a suit for separation,—he had sought his wife everywhere in order to plead his cause, and to dissipate her error. He invented details, mixed up, in this extravagant and chimerical recital, the names of suppositious persons, authors of all this trouble; attested his religious sentiments, and launched out into theories of conjugal happiness. In fine, he had overtaken the woman, who had sought to avoid him, at the hotel where she had just taken up her quarters; he had succeeded in speaking to her; he had determined on a supreme test. Was there anything more moral than a reconciliation?

And, in the end, he believed all that he had detailed, with such energy and nerve, and with so astonishing an accent of truth. He was moved, pathetic, tearful, at the remembrance of what he declared that he had suffered.

Monsieur Martinet convinced, softened, stammered out some excuses, praised heaven! And as Robert had announced his intention of leaving that morning, he bethought him at the same moment of all that he would put down in the bill.

### XIII.



POSTMARKS in every language and every style covered one among the number of letters Marie-Ange found awaiting her on her return to Paris. It had come from the Dutch East Indies, and it was written by Captain Le Goëdic :

*"My dear Children,*

"This is to inform you that I bear you tenderly in mind. I should be much concerned at not having heard from you, but that every sailor knows that he rarely receives all of the letters which are addressed to him until months after his return. Poor things ! these letters never overtake him. Anxiously as we expect them, we still fly from them, compelled, perhaps, by the nature of our calling to set out again at the very moment when they are about to arrive. They hasten after us ; they journey unremittingly, these dear missives, about which there are clustered so many of our hopes ! But, with us, the heart is fortified with sturdy affections, and those whom we love are always with us.

"The season has been a good one, and I rejoice on your account ; for an old fellow like me must no longer think of himself. The monsoon has been terrible this year in the China Seas, but the *Marie-Ange* is a valiant craft, and it is you who bring good luck to her, my darling daughter.

"In ten months from now I shall be in Brittany, and I hope as soon as I arrive to push my bearings as far north as Paris, so that I may embrace the little grandson whom, in the meanwhile, you will have given your affectionate father, whose

thoughts are always busy with him, even while taking the daily observation with the quadrant. It would be a fine idea to return perchance, and not to find him, the plump, rosy, little rascal, with lungs like a sea-dog !

“ BARNABÉ LE GOËDIC,

“ Captain of the *Marie-Ange*

“ In the harbor of Saravak (Borneo).”

Marie-Ange had blushed on reading this simple, kind letter from her father. She did not at first show it to Robert, because of a sort of bashfulness. She feared his raillery, which at that moment would have wounded her.

Remaining alone for some hours, she again took up the letter, reread it and kept it open before her, not without a certain degree of agitation. She not only felt herself guilty of forgetfulness towards the worthy captain, but there were certain words in this hastily-written note which deeply moved her.

A child ! She thought of it now for the first time, and the gravity of the marital relation suddenly dawned upon her. Had there not been enough of this folly ? Was there nothing, indeed, beside these thousand fantasies, perhaps dangerous, into which Robert had led her ? To be sure, he was charming and seductive in all these imaginings, perverted though they were. But toward what were they both tending, he and she ?

A child ! How was it possible that this thought had not yet occurred to her ? True, she had lived in a dizzy rush of constant and abrupt metamorphoses, in this moral whirlpool into which she had been drawn.

Half reclining upon a lounge, her dark eyes closed, the better to contemplate the new emotions which had stirred in her heart, she was absorbed in the dawn of a strange sentiment, succeeding the sensations to which, for months, she had passively abandoned herself, when Robert entered.

“ Well, my darling,” said he, with his habitual gaiety,

"how pensive you are! What is the matter? You have not received any bad news, I suppose?"

She started slightly, and a faint glow invaded her cheeks.

"No, none, I assure you!"

From the moment that he appeared, she felt that she was no longer mistress of herself. She yielded to a sort of magnetism.

The letter, meanwhile, had dropped to the floor. Robert picked it up.

"Will you kindly permit me?"

"Ah, Robert, you do not fancy that I could hide anything from you! A brief note from my father, reproaching us for our silence."

"Ha! the good old captain! You know that I think everything of him. It is a fact, we have not taxed the post overmuch so far as he is concerned. I own it. This very day we must repair our wrong, must we not?" And he ran through the letter with an amiable indifference; but when he reached the final lines, his brow darkened and he burst into a laugh.



"There! I knew you would make fun of it!" said Marie-Ange.

"What do you suppose?" he responded. "I do not care to picture you in all the solemnity of maternity, it is true! But you will not resent it, I am sure, if I do not desire that your girlish charms should be lessened! Imagine yourself becoming little by little deformed,—you, my adored Marie-Ange! No, it would be a crime. Perhaps there may be such things as 'august duties'; but I love you enough as you are! Oh, by-and-by, when we become very sedate—I do not say, no. But



what is the use of thinking of all that now ? A squalling baby, a nurse with her cap trimmed with long ribbons ! Brrr ! What images you evoke !”

And he tenderly kissed her.

“ Marital propriety ! You know I tremble to think of it !”

“ But,” said Marie-Ange, who had already completely surrendered herself again, powerless to resist him, “ observe, my dear, that with your superb imagination you are debating a theme which you have wholly improvised ! A simple whim of my father, nothing more !”

And dropping the subject, with his habitual versatility of mind, Robert narrated a thousand extravagances ; diverted Marie-Ange, and led her a long way off from the preceding conversation.

“ Will it not be most humiliating for me, if I am not to have the occasion of being jealous ?” said Robert.

Robert, in fact, was as if tormented by the regularity of their existence. He found it flat, and he cudgelled his brains for some means of enlivening it. It was irksome to him ; he felt a sort of revolt against the too great facility afforded him in his extravagances. He was weary of the theatrical surroundings which he himself invented to give an edge to habitual pleasure ; and in the species of morbid craving which haunted his intellect he had no notion of enjoying the companionship of his wife, except under whimsical and abnormal conditions. He frequently envied those unfortunate lovers who were compelled by their nomadic tenderness to seek the chance shelter of a lodging-house, thus assuring themselves of the momentary possession of a roof at the cost of mental disquietude and suspense ; or who were obliged to pass whole hours in a hackney coach, blurring the windows with their breath in order to hide their embraces. Stolen love, forbidden love was alone tempting to him ! Nevertheless, he certainly had experienced no lassitude in his relations with Marie-Ange, nor had the least thought of infidelity ever occurred to him. It was with

her alone that he wished to taste of these perverted joys—never pausing to ask himself whether there was not a certain aberration in this lack of respect, qualified though it was by a passion which was ever on the alert. He mocked at all ancient scruples of conjugal propriety.

He had *once* heard some talk about a certain restaurant, near one of the principal railroad termini, which, underneath a virtuous aspect, afforded an indulgent shelter, discreet and ingenious, with its interior setting a trifle sensational, in order to amuse the vitiated, for the overflowings of passion which had no moments to spare. Thither he took Marie-Ange, who suspected nothing. They entered the small, commonplace



parlor; and there dined together alone. But when they had finished, behold! The waiter, who had served them, touched a bell as he was withdrawing, and suddenly, as if in a pantomime, the table, laden as it was, disappeared through a trap in the floor, which, having opened with great celerity, closed again as quickly; while a partition rapidly glided to one side, revealing an alcove.

Marie-Ange uttered a little cry of astonishment which threw Robert into raptures.

“But it is a veritable trap,” said she, affrighted and almost dumbfounded.

"A trap, yes, like those in a melodrama, Madame. The tower of Nesle at so much an hour."

But because of a certain apprehension, she refused to remain there, where so many creatures had been before her; and she was disgusted by the suggested impurities of the place. Robert thereupon entreated her, finding a delicious charm in her resistance; he besought, insisted, infusing a genuine earnestness in his arguments. And as Marie-Ange became vexed, though not enough so to reproach him in truly angry fashion—as she remained firm notwithstanding—he felt himself enraptured.

In this ardent pursuit of voluptuous sensations, with which the imagination had so much to do, Robert would gladly have indulged at times in some real depravity, to impart a certain phase of ghastliness to his follies.

He managed at least, to gratify himself in the pursuit of love under conditions which furnished some little occasion for fear.

On an afternoon that was full of stormy menace, he proposed to Marie-Ange to take her to see an old rattle-trap of a structure that had been left him by inheritance, and which it had never yet occurred to him to sell. It was an ancient mill, beyond the village of Buc; a big, massive tower tumbling into ruins, characterless, for that matter, and only picturesque because of its state of dilapidation. He had fancied it because it had the air of a romantic relic, a manor-house of the Walter Scott type. He had done nothing to improve it and had allowed it to crumble away. It was much isolated, overlooking the valley of the Bièvre as far as the eye could reach, even to the distant woods which bordered the horizon with their changing colors.



It was a long time, indeed, since he had seen it last, and in describing it to Marie-Ange he confounded his memory and his fancy together in his usual capricious style, and gave to it a certain grandiose importance which it was very far from possessing.

The air was heavy, almost to suffocation. The threatening sky was of that grayish hue, at once sombre and appalling, which, with an overpowering heat, presages an outburst of the elemental fury. There were shocks of electricity in the stifling atmosphere.

"Ah!" said Marie-Ange, "is it quite prudent to choose such a day as this for our excursion? Is it not too late to set out, already?"

"But do you not think," replied Robert, "that we ought to get a breath of air? Besides, is a valiant little Breton like yourself to be kept back by a few drops of rain? For my part, I own, I cannot bear to remain in-doors. At the same time, we can't go out for a stupid promenade in the city, like folks from the provinces."

And he insisted, mustering a score of arguments with which to persuade Marie-Ange, and experiencing a certain pleasure in struggling against her will, which yielded nevertheless little by little.

"You will, will you not? It will be charming. One must see this tower of mine in somewhat sombre weather, just like this, to discover in it the genuine aspect of a bit of stage-scenery."

"Very well, then, since you desire it."

They took the train at the St. Lazare station, stopping at Versailles. Clouds were massing themselves blacker and blacker; sharp blasts of wind whirled the leaves about, and low mutterings of thunder were already heard. Robert gazed at the sky in some anxiety; but Marie-Ange did not suspect that it was because he feared that the storm might pass, or end in a simple shower, and the odd project he had conceived be

deprived of one of its chief features. But, indeed, this was scarcely possible now. A veritable tempest was brewing.

Hence the hackney-coachman whom Robert halted seemed to experience a little surprise when he received the order to drive towards Buc.

"After passing the aqueduct, going up the hill," said Robert, "you will stop."

"Fine weather, this, for a ride," muttered the man. "We'll be soaked to the bones. Will you be long about it?"

"No, you will only have to take us there," said Robert in so low a tone that Marie-Ange, who was entering the carriage, could not hear him.

It was five o'clock. The horse seemed also to suffer from the state of the atmosphere, which inflicted a sort of painful irritation upon the nerves of both man and beast. He started at a rapid pace, descended the street which leads to the Chantiers station at full speed, pranced a little under the railroad bridge on which a train was passing, and stretched himself out at a full gallop as he ascended the hill which begins opposite the cemetery.

In half an hour, at this gait, which was not his habitual one, he reached the aqueduct. A few scattered raindrops of tremendous size were descending, quickly drying, however, in the dusty roadway, where little cyclones of fine sand were rising and lashing him sharply in the nostrils.

"Farther on!" said Robert, leaning forward. "You will soon see a little pine wood to your left. That's the place."

A few minutes later the carriage came to a halt.

"But where is your ruin?" asked Marie-Ange.

"Do you not see it over there behind the trees? Look, that tumble-down building! The deuce! I did not promise you an historic pile!"

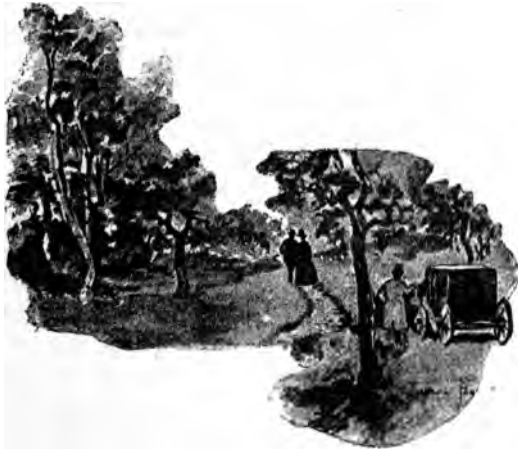
She alighted, half laughing, half pouting. He led her across the little wood to the mill.

"Ah!" he said, "just a word to our coachman, and then I will return and do the honors of my donjon!"

In an instant Robert was beside his man, who was fuming, while gazing up at the black clouds, which were ready to dissolve in a furious deluge. He handed him a bank-note.

"By the Lord, Monsieur, where do you expect me to get the change in this desert?"

"I don't expect any. You will merely return to the first tavern at Buc. There you will have some cold meat, some



fruit, some wine, and some plates prepared. You will have the whole put in a basket; this basket you will bring to the archway at the door of the mill, without uttering a word, and then you will be free."

"All right, I understand," murmured the coachman, winking. "Enough; so long as you do not ask me to wait in such weather as this, I am at your service."

"Very well. Do what I tell you. Above all, do not knock when you return."

"Bless you! I'm discretion itself."

Robert rejoined Marie-Ange, already somewhat alarmed at

the dilapidated condition of the old structure, garlanded as it was with wild vines, brilliant with autumn tints, and possessing a certain picturesque charm. The devastated roof seemed only to remain in place as by a miracle. A few stones which had become loosened had rolled to the ground; deep crevices were making their appearance. One might have taken it for a stage scene, that of the Eben tower, for instance, in "The Romance of a Poor Young Man."

"Well," he gaily demanded, "what do you think of my manor-house?"

"Your 'manor-house' makes me afraid," responded Marie-Ange, laughing; "it reminds one of the castles described by Anne Radcliffe, whose novels I secretly read while at the convent."

"Oh, you make it worse than it is; though they do say," added he, with perfect naturalness, "that one of the millers, who formerly lived here, was assassinated—"

"Brrr! You give me a fright!"

He opened the door of the mill and they entered a large room, the ceiling of which was supported by great beams, which seemed to tremble with the violence of the wind. The windows had only a few squares of glass left, and these had little by little become covered with moss. There were but a few ancient pieces of furniture in the place, very crude in character, and in a pitiable state underneath the layer of dust which covered them, furniture which had been left by the latest inhabitant, some servitor of the castle, which since then had been demolished. It had formed a dependence of an ancient seignorial domain, purchased by one of Robert's great-uncles during the Revolution. The domain had been acquired at a very low price, but the purchaser had not had the means afterwards to keep it up. His descendants had sold it in successive lots; in the end retaining only the servants' quarters, a few barns, a small farm-house and mill, which for a long time had been unused.

The last possessor of this remnant of the domain had died some years before, and Robert had shared his mediocre effects with a cousin. This cousin, a practical man, had torn down all of the ancient structures which existed on his part of the heritage, and had then sold the ground. Robert, who was given to fantasy, had been diverted by the oddity of the ruin which had fallen to him, and had left the task of completing its destruction to time. Besides, with his habitual carelessness, he had practically forgotten it until the day when he had bethought him of taking Marie-Ange to visit it, in search of extraordinary sensations, the idea of which continually haunted him.

While Robert, playfully assuming the role of guide, was detailing the particular features of his tower to his wife, a frightful crash of thunder resounded, and with an instinctive movement, Marie-Ange pressed close against him.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Robert, "here we are in a really melodramatic situation!"

A blinding flash had just flung a sanguinary glow across the melancholy twilight. At the same time the rain, until then intermittent, struck furiously against the half-shattered windows, and with such force that some of the panes which had long been cracked, were entirely dislodged, and fell in fragments at the feet of Marie-Ange.

"Haven't we enough of local color here, though, what with the storm?" exclaimed Robert. But Marie-Ange, dismayed by the flash, which had been really terrible, hid her face in her hands.

"Let us go! Let us go!" she cried.

"Now? You cannot think of it! We are at least sheltered here. I assure you this tempest, around this wind-shaken rattle-trap, is highly diverting. For that matter, indeed, it will be over in a very few minutes. Let's see; let us make an inventory of our ruins."

With his arm around her waist, he playfully dragged her



into the middle of the chamber. A wooden stairway led up into a loft. He mounted two steps, but the third one cracked beneath him with a dolorous sound.



"The stairway isn't strong," said he, and he descended. Exploration in that direction was not prudent.

He espied a large curtain masking a corner of the room, a curtain of common stuff in red plaids. Shaking the dust off, he drew it aside. A bed of planks was there, absolutely bare.

"The devil! the furniture is not luxurious."

He opened a drawer in a crazy bureau, but he found in it only an old fashioned, popular image of Geneviève de Brabant, the ingenious

legend of which he read ironically in declamatory tones. The rain redoubled; the thunder rolled continuously.

"Robert, Robert, make fun of me, if you like, but I haven't the heart to laugh. Please be so kind as to call the coachman."

"All right; since you do not care for this romantic situation, I obey you."

And he smiled slightly, though invisibly to her, and going to the door, pretended to look in the direction of the highway.

"Ah!" he cried, "this is too bad!"

"What's the matter?"

"The rascal has disappeared."

"It isn't possible!"

"Yes, it is. He must have been afraid of the rain. He has gone, taken refuge in some inn."

Then, as if in the very greatest surprise, he exclaimed:

"Ah! what a good joke!"

"What?"

"He's an ingenious chap. At least, he is thoughtful, if he has abandoned us. Look here."

And Robert exhibited to Marie-Ange the basketful of provisions which he had ordered to be brought, *without his knowledge*.

"The fellow must have gone to a tavern to dine, and there ordered a luncheon for us. Chicken, white wine, some fruit, bread, plates, and even the bill! He will come for us after he has finished. But he is a genuine comedy valet, this coachman."

"Now, Robert," cried Marie-Ange, astounded, "there are no comedy valets. You ordered all this yourself. It's a regular trick!"

"How can you say that? It's only a simple chance, a quite extraordinary chance, I admit—"

"Oh, I'll not believe you. I was quite sure that you meditated another turn, after your fashion."

"Pshaw! And even were it so, will not this be a charming little impromptu dinner, with the storm bellowing about us?"

And he kissed Marie-Ange on the neck, low down, at the very spot where his caresses always gave her a little thrill.

Her smiles gradually returned.

"Come, confess to your plot."

"I confess, my sweet Marie-Ange, that I adore you."

And thus beguiling her with his gaiety, he promptly spread the cloth on the table, and testing the chairs, one by one, placed the two which were strongest beside it.

"At least," said Marie-Ange, still pouting a little, "you assure me that the cabman will return?"

"In less than an hour he will be back."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, as she suddenly sat down with both hands to her ears. The rolling of the thunder, which had

been heard at a distance, now drew nearer, and a fresh peal reverberated with great violence.

"Good!" said Robert; "that is nothing: it's the parting salute. We shall soon have clearing weather."

He carved the chicken dexterously, at the same time passing her a wing; but she was not hungry. The storm oppressed her. In order to rally her, he pretended to have a grand appetite.



"Heavens!" said Marie-Ange, suddenly, "we can't see any longer; the night has come. We shall be without any light!"

She got up quickly, went to the door and opened it. A flash darted zigzag through the heavens; the wind closed the door in her face.

"The coachman is not there! I knew it! What will become of us? I shall not remain here, I warn you! Anything rather than to stay longer in this ruin, where I shall die of fear!"

She took a mantle, a light peasant's mantle for late summer, and hastily donned it.

"The village of Buc is not far away; we shall find a carriage there."

"A carriage at Buc, where there are nothing but farm-laborers?"

"Well, we will sleep at the tavern, then; and we will return to Versailles on foot."

"In this weather? You cannot think of it! It is really a terrible squall; your little feet would stick fast in the mud."

"Oh, how wicked you are, to act so! I am furious against you! I shall not forgive you for this deception."

Robert simulated great confusion. In his heart he was in raptures; everything had come to pass just as he had hoped it would. The storm, even, was greater than it had promised to be. Flash upon flash, almost without a pause, illumined the sky, and through one corner of the window the entire landscape now appeared as with a tragic ghastliness in the wild tumult of this dread combat of the elements.

"Marie-Ange," said Robert, "why should you be afraid? I am right here by you, close beside you;" and in the darkness, which was now complete, he took her hand, after groping around for it, and his voice became caressing, very soft, with a sort of protecting tenderness.

By another flash he perceived that she was weeping, the tears trembling in her eyes; and he felt a profound emotion in his heart.

"If you knew how lovely you are at this moment!"

"The time is well chosen to pay me compliments!"

She freed herself, and by the light which was shed by a bolt of fire which flung its sparks across the heavens, she again directed her steps towards the door, this time very resolutely.

"You will not let me go alone, I suppose."

"But I will not let you go at all. One cannot venture out in such a storm as this. Come, be reasonable. Wait a little. I am going to build you a fire. The darkness, though it had its charm, will no longer be so dense."

He forced her, with all sorts of insistent coaxing, to seat herself on the aged bedstead, while he laughingly reduced two chairs to fragments, an easy matter enough, and threw them into the fire-place. Two or three matches sufficed to set fire to the dry wood, and the wind, which penetrated through every cranny of the old structure, fanned the hearth.

But on the enfeebled walls the flames cast fantastic shad-

ows that seemed to spring from every corner, to grow, to advance immeasurably, to wander about the room.

"Good gracious!" said Robert, perfidiously, "it looks as if my mill were haunted!"

And he gazed at Marie-Ange, who, full of fear, followed, despite herself, the eccentric movements of these fantastic silhouettes on the wall. He looked at her fondly, and with a delicious enjoyment of her emotion.

The rain raged violently. The thunder rolled nearer and nearer. So severe were the shocks that stones were loosened from the crumbling walls, and fell with a dull sound to the earth, sinking into the mud of the soaked fields adjacent to them. The neighboring trees cracked dismally, and in the distance a railroad whistle, with its lugubrious accent, seemed like a cry of distress. On the slope of the Bièvre was heard the heavy groaning of a land-slide. There was no longer a moment of respite. It was as if they were in the midst of a sea of fire; and though Robert experienced strange delights in this situation for which he had so longed, though his fine humor did not abandon him, yet the perspiration ran from his forehead.

Marie-Ange had crouched down by the side of the bed, twining her arms about her head, and her hair, partly loosened, fell about her shoulders. She remained quiet, only shaken now and then by a slight shudder.

She started, as Robert, gliding softly to her side, took her hand, which was burning, and kissed it ardently. She resisted, sought to drive him from her, and struggled against him at first with a certain obstinacy. But even in his folly he was sincere. Exhausted, enervated, overwhelmed, little by



little her fright left her, dissolved in an unconscious felicity, in a warm languor, in a delicious prostration.

Now they no longer heeded the sound of the thunder, the wild tumult of the storm, the frightful battle of wind and rain. They clasped each other tightly; in the midst of their fevered embraces they no longer knew where they were, nor what was going on about them. And if the flash of the lightning again assailed their sight, which was now voluptuously veiled, it seemed to them as if they were inundated by the rays of an ineffable light.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### XIV.



LEARLY, it was becoming a sort of romantic mania with Robert. Strange imaginings pressed upon his excited brain. Though he had always succeeded in vanquishing it, he felt that a profound resistance was now developing on the part of Marie-Ange. She talked of reason; she said, in her pretty way, that it was time for them to order their lives somewhat more seriously. In reality, he was delighted to have to overcome these scruples that seized her at times. They stimulated his taste for the struggle, and his fondness for the fantastic; he found a long-sustained pleasure in finally leading her whither his caprice directed. It would have vexed him now if she had been too docile: the fears, the alarms which he experienced each time before he had overcome her, seemed exquisite to him.

Sometimes he would only half explain what he expected of her. Her surprise diverted him; and she would so far lose her self-possession in moments of consternation, as to seek protection with him. Then forgetting her affrighted modesty, she would enjoy quite as much as he did the comedy he had prepared for her, in order to give a new flavor to their carresses.

For a long time he had discounted the pleasure of a single moment, of a mad escapade under extraordinary conditions. Nothing in the world, he thought, would induce him to forego the realization of the dramatic situation which he had in mind, even were the one moment in question to be purchased

only by the most irksome, laborious, and complicated scheming

As to Marie-Ange, if she sometimes felt like reproaching herself for taking part in these masquerades, into which Robert constantly led her, she acknowledged, with some confusion, that she found in them a most pleasing agitation. And her weakness was, in fact, complicity.

At that period, two or three mysterious "dramas of love," as they were called in the reportorial columns of the journals, had caused a certain excitement. They were all suicides, accomplished under almost identical circumstances, as if there had really been a contagion of self-murder. Two lovers, who had obtained lodgings in a hotel, poisoned themselves after a supreme embrace, and they were found in each other's arms, cold in death, but with their faces expressive of ecstatic joy; attesting that the final agony had not been without its element of pleasure.

Some days later there was a similar story. These tragedies of love had, nevertheless, brought deliverance to their victims; a letter without signature, beside an empty vial, confessed that their purpose had been to end their lives together.

The chroniclers had seized upon these resolutions of despairing youth, and everywhere articles were printed wherein the writers gravely philosophized upon the aberrations of the time; while others, by way of paradox, exalted these fine epicureans, who made of death itself a supreme delight. A literary school, notably, which delighted in abnormal sentiments and expressed them in obscure and far-fetched terms, sang triumphantly of the sombre beauty of destinies like these, which it glorified the while.

Robert did not go so far as to envy these lovers, enamored of a mortal ecstasy. Still, these recitals, given with a wealth of detail, kept running through his head. He would have wished—not for death, which seemed to him somewhat too definitive an experiment; but at least for a deep, though tran-



sient, oblivion, due to one of these legendary philters which for a time suppress all signs of life; a delightful slumber, by degrees attaining a total suspension of energy, giving the impression of a departure from earth, as if the spirit were taking its flight in space. Oh, those uncertain moments of abandon, of engulfment in the infinite, without notion of time, in a mist of dreams!

Longing for such languors as these, he fancied that he might find, among modern anæsthetics (for Shakespeare does not sufficiently describe the beverage used by Juliet in order to rejoin her Romeo), the magic soporific. He had the good taste, however, to abandon this fantasy, despite its poetic charm, on bethinking himself that it would be prudent to make sure of the effect of the marvellous drug before exposing Marie-Ange to the possible inconvenience of not waking again.

And with his versatility of spirit, he was pleased to imagine simply a sort of parody on those dramatic scenes, childish and extravagant though it was. He would take a room with Marie-Ange at a hotel; he would affect a preoccupied air: she would endeavor apparently to conceal her features. He would hesitate to give his name, so that it would manifestly appear that it was false; he would respond absent-mindedly to the proffers of attention made by the servants. He would hastily seek the chamber assigned them. The next day, they would not appear; they would remain locked in their room, making not the slightest noise. The landlord, his mind somewhat disturbed by the recent suicides, would become alarmed—would come and knock at their door, and, obtaining no response, would be persuaded, upon recalling their suspicious conduct, that a tragedy had occurred; he would inform the commissary of police.

It was at this moment that Robert represented to himself the delights of reciprocal tenderness, of precautions taken in order that the mystery might not be betrayed. Again they

would be called : colloquies would be held in the corridor; they would hear the exchange of affrighted words: "They have killed themselves! There was something suggestive about their manner! I felt sure that something was wrong!" At last, the commissary would give the order to open, and they would be discovered, simulating the greatest confusion, the most profound embarrassment! The magistrate would be enraged; he would charge the landlord with subjecting him to a ridiculous procedure : the latter would protest his good intentions, would stammer out some excuses. It would be delightful.

Only certain vulgar aspects of this plan, which he laughingly exposed to Marie-Ange, jarring with the delicacy of his habits and his ideas of elegance, prevented him from carrying it out.

It occurred to him, however, one day, as a good lark, to take her to a hotel, a hotel of severe aspect, for the mere pleasure of affronting the suspicious gaze of the venerable dame, with her cap bridled with mauve ribbons, who sat enthroned behind the desk. And while the porter exchanged glances with her, while lifting the empty satchel which Robert had purchased for the sake of appearances just a moment before, the latter experienced a keen delight in hearing them muster up various pretexts for refusing him a lodging. "Ugh!" exclaimed he in a low voice, "an old married couple like ourselves to be mistaken for two runaways seeking a refuge! Very droll, isn't it?"

The old dame stammered her excuses meanwhile, embarrassed by Robert's evident intention not to understand them. In her heart, perhaps, she found them a very nice couple, and her reading of the newspaper *feuilletons* during her leisure hours had no doubt disposed her to be indulgent, and somewhat curious as well, as to romantic intrigues, of which there had been a dearth in her own life. There was a struggle within her between sympathy and duty.

She made a little sign to Robert, who leaned over towards her, the very lightest tinge of a blush dawning upon her wrinkled old cheeks, and she said to him quickly:

"Impossible here, you know; established patronage—family hotel—"

And she added, screwing up her face into a disdainful expression:

"Provincials! But all the same, we must not frighten them."

This agreeable check put Robert in a fine good humor, and he succeeded in making Marie-Ange share in his gaiety. He led her a fantastic chase, as if they were really pursued, towards the far-off quarters lying near the great boulevards between the Sceaux railroad terminus and the Maison Blanche, where the Bièvre, with its tanneries, appears from time to time like a panorama of distant ramparts.

And, in jest, he talked of the gladness of this instant of liberty, as if Marie-Ange were the slave of a jealous husband, and so had stolen away to meet him, her lover.

So he kept on; and in imagination he had soon created this husband. He pictured him to himself, gave him life, even physical attributes, habits and moral peculiarities—an old man, but not of the ridiculous type; one whose anger might be tragic, who would not submit easily to be made an object of derision. He really saw him; described him minutely so that Marie-Ange also saw him, though she scoffed at the idea and told him to hush! at the same time, laughing at this chimerical portrait and delighting in the stroll.

Thus, for the moment they were two lovers who had no certain means of meeting each other, who, having found a rare opportunity of being together for a few hours, an opportunity which would not occur again perhaps for a long time, were at once in ecstasies and heart-broken, burning with passion, pressing close to each other, and already tasting the sweet bitterness of the anguish of separation.

In this new masquerade, it was understood that their next meeting, ardently desired, would perhaps be surrounded by still greater difficulties, and they were supposed to find exquisite delight in this moment of stolen bliss.

They finally succeeded in feeling their torments as if they were real. They prolonged their promenade along the vast boulevard, which was almost deserted, in the melancholy light of the dying day, while the trees cloaked themselves in shadow, and they felt a strangely voluptuous thrill darting through them. Oh, the exquisite sadness of this twilight, as they wandered on at hazard, repeating amorous nonsense to each other. But the conviction came to them, little by little, that they must tear themselves away from this sweet intercourse, and return to life's brutal reality; that already they had staid longer than was prudent. The belfry of a school-house rang the hour, and absorbed as they were in their respective parts, they started, as it were, almost naturally.

The street-lamps were being lighted in the distance; a line of luminous points, coming out along the vast horizon, marked the sparsely-settled thoroughfares, drawing nearer to them, as if warning them to make haste with their adieux.

At this moment, Robert was charming, with his tender grace of manner, hardly knowing himself whether he was pursuing a frivolous fiction or was really in earnest. He loaded her with a thousand solicitous attentions; devising means by which they could communicate with each other; especially thanking her for having come, and beseeching her to come again. And she, still yielding to the species of magic which he knew so well how to evoke, with its



dazzling mirages of romance and sentiment, stood undecided, feeling deeply moved despite herself, and as if intoxicated by all these suggestions.

“ Well,” said Robert, with a sigh, “ it cannot be helped.”

Slowly, and with now and then a delightful halt in those last moments, without objection on her part,—for it seemed to her that she was half dazed—he led her to a hackney-coach stand, placed her in her seat with many pretended precautions against observation, and then quickly withdrew, while the vehicle rolled away.

He continued his dream. He saw Marie-Ange returning to the house which imagination had depicted to him, trembling with that charming animation that is born of disquietude. He saw her presently, after a rapid toilet—as if through modesty she would not wear the same costume with which her lover had come in contact—seat herself opposite her husband, whose likeness he amused himself by composing, and who was now jealously scrutinizing her features. And suddenly he felt a sharp pang—so severe that he roused himself, as though he had been asleep. Alone in the middle of the Square of the Observatory, which he had gradually approached on foot, he looked about him an instant, greatly astonished; then he burst into a loud fit of laughter.

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## XV.

ONGING recollections of this excursion returned incessantly to Robert's mind. By insinuating persuasion, he continued to induce Marie-Ange to lend herself to the fictions of his disordered, yet vigorous, fancy.

In the neighborhood of the Park Monceau, he hired a small apartment, one of those coquettish, mysterious ground-floors with numerous issues, which are well suited to serve as refuges for trembling lovers, perpetually fearful of possible discovery.

He had learned of it through an agent, and as the complaisant proprietor impressed upon him by half-uttered phrases the security of this abode, which had sheltered many successive generations of lovers, and showed him the three doors issuing upon each of the three streets adjoining the house, he intimated that his was a case in which the gravest precautions were needful. This conversation greatly amused him with its cynical inferences, enveloped in discreet forms, in which only a vague pronoun served to designate the actors in the amorous comedy of which this was to be the scene.

He changed the furnishings of the apartment; caused thicker carpets to be laid and heavier curtains to be hung. The sounds from without could no longer penetrate into this closed interior, lighted at all hours by dimly-shaded lamps, which shed a soft semi-radiance.

There, during the day, with passionate tenderness and gentle cajolery, he would receive Marie-Ange, contriving by dint

of personal fascination to drive from her brow the shadows of disquietude caused by her complicity in this new caprice; reassuring her and triumphing over her scruples.

But he besought her, above all, upon entering there, to leave behind her her halitual life, and to bring with her to their rendezvous a new and distinct personality. Once, when she continued a conversation which they had begun at home during the morning, he yielded to a vexed impulse and quitted her abruptly, declaring that the charm had been broken, while she was only amazed at this irritation.

He desired her to wear costumes that he had never before seen, to arrange her hair in a different manner, to assume for these escapades a new incarnation, as it were; and when, one day in a jest, she had transformed herself into a blonde, he thanked her effusively.

Or, at other times, leaving the house early, he would despatch a message to her, appointing a meeting between them in the chapel of some church.

And he would wait for her there, stationed behind a pillar, half intoxicated by the odors of incense which floated past him, watching on all sides for her coming. The church at this midday hour was nearly deserted. A few women, sitting or kneeling near a statue of the Virgin, watched the little tapers, stuck upon a triangle and fluttering in the least breath of air, as if they were hypnotized; and the old woman who had them there for sale, whose face had assumed the very color of her tapers, extinguished from time to time those that had burned down, with slow precaution. With short strides, a sacristan crossed the nave, bowing his head indifferently as he passed in front of the altar. Whisperings from a confessional reached Robert's ears, and the slightest sound, caused by the moving of a chair, assumed a strange sonorousness in the midst of this repose.

Breathing a mystic sensuality, he contemplated the images of the saints, the stations of the cross, the ornaments of the

altar, and his eyes followed the reflection that was cast by the stained glass on the pavement—a trail of light, as if a veil of magic woof had been flung upon the ground. The tender and voluptuous aspect of Catholicism took complete possession of him; he felt himself softened, appeased, enveloped in a vague emotion. But soon, without needing to turn his head, he perceived the approach of Marie-Ange. He felt her coming towards him, gliding softly along, past the rows of seats; and in this moment of abandon, the meeting seemed delightful.

Then they chatted in very low tones, lingering to make the round of the church, as if this were the only asylum that was offered them; at times puzzling a young vicar who passed them, a trifle perturbed by their profane attitude, turning away his gaze, and again looking at them involuntarily.

But in this thirst for religious sensations, which Robert desired as a new excitant to love, the mildness of Catholicism appeared to him too common place. He happened to learn that there was in the Rue Thouin, in the neighborhood of the Pantheon, an odd little church where the Swedenborgians, those final devotees of a faith that is wholly built of chimeras, held communion. The strange theories analyzed by Balzac, in his "*Seraphitus Seraphita*," at once returned to his memory, with the part played by the angel in the visions of the prophet, and the ultimate fusion of the being—predicted by him of couples who are united in love.

In the reception of this mystic teaching, in the semblance of a great religious fervor, in this doctrine of the absorption of two spouses in a single being, to which one brings under-





standing and the other will, speaking as but one flesh at the hour of resurrection—he conceived that there must be the keenest enjoyment, pleasure hitherto unknown, languors leading suddenly to intensest longings. For the rest, he felt no disposition, sceptic as he was, to give himself up to the seductive folly of these beliefs. The language, laden as it was with morbid suggestiveness, alone attracted him.

Unaccompanied at first by Marie-Ange, he made the pilgrimage to this little temple, lost at the extremity of an obscure street. It was Sunday, and the hour was three; the doors were open. For a moment he was misled by the austerity of the place; for he had expected some ornate embellishment, some pompous display, such as would be appropriate, he thought, in this “Church of the Angels,” as it was called; he even looked for *iconostases*, like those adorning Russian chapels. What he saw, however, was an almost naked hall, furnished only with benches, without other adornment than garlands of vine, olive, and fig leaves, which were arrayed symbolically around the walls. There was no altar; but in front of a large panel, painted blue and decorated with golden stars, stood a little pulpit, from which a man with a long white beard and the face of an apostle, was declaiming.

The language that he used, however, was full of suavity. Discoursing upon the “Celestial Arcanum,” he analyzed with precision what Swedenborg had said of love, uttering sweet and bewildering aphorisms, such as these: “The very life of man is love, and as love is, so is life.” “It is the dominant and ruling love which makes the man.” “Man chooses for his goal that which he loves above all else; he keeps it constantly before him under all circumstances. It is an element of his will, like the hidden springs of a river which flows resistlessly onward.” “The gratification of man’s love is his good; the non-gratification of it is his evil.”

Robert did not catch the explanations of the preacher, which

attributed a religious meaning to these words of the apostle. The word love, which was constantly recurring, had for him a charm like that of music.

He looked at the audience. It consisted of some thirty persons ; the women, some of whom were very handsome, being in the majority. They all seemed in a state of exaltation and devout fervor, absorbed in heavenly raptures, and indifferent to the earth. An old man, joining his hands, lifted his eyes to the starry vault of the ceiling ; assuredly, he must have been at that moment in communion with the angels to whom Swedenborg gives the perfected human form. On every visage was portrayed a supernatural joy ; and Robert, yielding for a moment to the influence of the place, thought that surely a doctrine which could impart such an illusion of happiness ought not to be lightly treated.

There were present people of every grade, mingling in a communion which was truly fraternal. A working-girl in her little black gown, her doleful features at this moment brightened and transfigured—a poor, disgraced creature, who had turned towards the mysterious devotion of this sect, which cherished impracticable sentimental aspirations—was seated beside a lady in a severely elegant toilet, who was beautiful and pallid underneath her veil of sorrow. What consolation did she find in this enthusiastic faith for a grief that positive reason was powerless to lull ? Were all those who were present there, so respectful and so impressed, persons who had been tried and wounded in this life, who had failed to find the balm which they needed in dogmas that were too dry and too rigid ?

He recounted to Marie-Ange his visit to the temple of the Swedenborgians, fancifully depicting their religion to her in such sympathetic colors that he awakened her curiosity ; and on the morrow he appeared in company with her before the shepherd of the little spiritual flock of the Rue Thouin.

They were a little discountenanced, when, after being announced, they were introduced into a substantial, middle-class drawing-room, resembling the interior of a notary's dwelling under Louis-Philippe. A somewhat prepossessing maid asked them to wait, regarding them with some astonishment the while. It even seemed that there was something like pity in the gaze of this servant, familiar as she was with the edifying matters inculcated in this house.

"You promised me a different stage-setting," said Marie-Ange, smiling.

"Ah, my dear," said Robert, "wait; suppose yourself as yet only on the threshold of the sanctuary."

On hearing heavy footsteps on the waxed floor of the corridor, they composed their countenances seriously, like scholars in peril of a surprise.

The chief of the little church, Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer, entered. He was robed in a long dressing-gown, which vaguely imparted to him a sacerdotal air; and on his venerable head, which suggested that of a holy, bearded saint, he wore a cap that resembled a nimbus. He courteously apologized for his attire on the ground of ill-health, and inquired the object of their visit.

He was at once lawyer, attorney, apostle. Legal papers and little pamphlets exalting Swedenborgianism, on the covers of which near the bottom of the page was this note: "New Jerusalem Library," were mixed together in equal confusion on his desk. Packages of official documents, suggesting chicanery and red tape, were piled up beside two enormous volumes in white calf, which contained numerous "markers," fragments of notes, small bits of paper covered with minute handwriting.

When Robert, in the most serious tone which he could command, informed him that he had chanced to be present at one of his sermons, that he had been deeply impressed, that he was eager to be initiated into doctrines of which he had

heard but a few passages, the face of Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer became illumined.

“How !” said he, “it is not on business, then?”

He certainly was not accustomed to seeing proselytes present themselves very often before him—in spite of the ingenious propaganda that he employed, which consisted in giving students the free use of a library in which they could perform their tasks with ease and comfort, accompanying the loan of each scientific book with the presentation of a little pamphlet which was at the same time slipped between the leaves.

Without waiting, therefore, to be urged, he set forth at once the chief features of the religious system of Swedenborg. And in talking of his faith, he again grew eloquent, imposing, majestic.

He told of Swedenborg's visions, his extraordinary perceptions, his conversations with celestial spirits, the revelations made by him; how mankind possess spiritual senses, which may become receptive if God permits it; how the hour of a more fervent love, predicted in the Apocalypse, had come. It was all in the Scriptures, in the Bible. But the Bible, besides its apparent sense, possessed another sense, which is the true Divine Word and the science of conformity. The spiritual part of a man has a substance. United to a material body during its terrestrial existence, it remains after death an organism with a perfected human form, possessing senses analogous to those that it enjoyed in this world, but adapted to perceptions of a higher order. He told them of the changes of condition among the angels, their government, their dwellings, their attire. The angels have once been men, somewhere or other; that is to say, they have been subjected to a period of formation, during which they have been able to open their hearts freely to the celestial influence, and to prepare themselves for a higher and infinitely progressive existence.

Robert and Marie-Ange listened, amazed yet charmed with-

al by this doctrine which was all love, and they returned again the next day, for Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer did not purpose to give their zeal the time to cool.

Robert affected so great a fervor, that Marie-Ange herself did not know what to think.

“Are you serious this time?”

“Can you doubt it?” he responded, laughing. He delighted to envelop their love in this atmosphere of mysticism. But she very soon comprehended the perversity of this devotion, with which he was intoxicating himself. As he had done always, he was merely seeking a change from which he could derive a new stimulus.

Thus their initiation went on for some time. Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer once informed them gravely that the last judgment, as taught by Swedenborg, took place in the year 1757, and this detail failed not to astonish them a little. But Robert would have been disconsolate over common-sense explanations, for he plunged into this mystery with very great delight. The commentator of the doctrine added that the true reign of peace on earth would begin on the day when a race yet unknown, now inhabiting the centre of Africa, and which has preserved the divine verities intact, should make its appearance among the nations.

But, to tell the truth, all of this romanticism left him somewhat cold. What most charmed him was the poetical grace of these assertions, which affirmed unto the favored ones the possibility of visions, an ultimate commerce with the celestial phalanges which surround the Deity, who permits Himself to be seen by them, seated on a throne of sunbeams.

After each of these interviews, Robert, never betraying to Marie-Ange the fact that he was jesting, manifested a grave, meditative, almost respectful tenderness towards her. He employed a mystical language. He kissed her chastely upon the forehead; he pretended a period of trial and purification.

The moment came at last when, being sufficiently instructed by Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer, who was enraptured by so much enthusiasm, he could ask the latter to solemnize their marriage according to the Swedenborgian rite.

Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer made some objection at first; but, reflected he, such a spectacle would be edifying to the members of his church, and there was no need, after all, of revealing the fact to them that the couple who were about to be united in the sight of Heaven had already received a different benediction.

It was this ceremony that Robert awaited, in order to taste the full joy of the comedy that his caprice had prepared. He gave the closest attention to Marie-Ange's toilet. He designed it himself, making her wear a very simple costume, suggesting a sort of Roman tunic, white, fringed with cerulean blue. It was his wish that her hair should be partly undone. She was charming thus—he told her so in passionate words.

She was quite agitated when they advanced to the middle of the temple, the faithful who had assembled chanting a psalm. But she felt that Robert was devouring her with his eyes; she felt an extreme pleasure in being thus under his absolute empire, after the resistance she had at first made, for she was not quite certain that she was not committing a sacrilege.

Monsieur Le Roy du Noyer, having donned a sort of surplice, much moved and greatly pleased to officiate, motioned them to a couple of chairs, which had been placed for them near the pulpit, which he slowly ascended.

He explained to them how two souls encountered each other, drawn together by a divine law. He told how by marriage they became one, by a harmonious accord; how after death, which was not to be dreaded, but rather to be desired, because of the ineffable joys of the supreme revelations, one flesh, the union of strength and beauty, embodied the single blended soul; he portrayed those happy beings, with whom love has

wrought this happy miracle, transformed into angels and bearing the symbolical golden girdle.

His voice assumed inflections of caressing tenderness. Already he saw in this couple only the angel which they were to form together; he saluted them both with but one benediction; he opened to them the kingdom of heaven with its dazzling gardens, its flowery groves of giant plants, its streets of precious stones. And even there he did not forbid the memory of terrestrial joys; but these memories would be greatly enlightened, so that they might comprehend that divine quality by which these felicities had come to pass within the realm of love.

Adorable joy! To be but one, so closely blended together as to form but one body, but one spirit, forever more!

And Robert turned a burning gaze upon Marie-Ange. Ah! if the apostle of the Swedenborgian faith had but known how much less he was thinking of those future serenities of Heaven than of those of earth!

Marie-Ange appeared to him transformed, glorified; he thought to lose himself in her in a long forgetfulness. He no longer recalled the laborious preparation which had led up to this passional devotion, this religious fervor serving as an adjunct to love. The hour had come which he had so much desired, when he should be unconscious of all, abandoning himself to an ecstatic adoration of the loved one, now metamorphosed in his eyes, which invested her with a supernatural beauty. The suave words which were chanted in his ears had aided this self-suggestion, by which he, the Parisian of the boulevards, succeeded now in imagining unknown delights, without possible comparison with ordinary transports; delights, so to speak, that were sacred.

The words, the phrases of the mystic harangue, had for him a material sense, causing a thrill to run throughout his whole being.

The discourse ended. The psalms recommenced. Robert heard nothing more; he saw nothing more; he mechanically accepted a copy of the "Celestial Doctrine," a gift of the church to those whom it unites. His thoughts were all of Marie-Ange; he was pale with inward rapture.



## XVI.



NEXPECTEDLY, one morning, Robert received a funeral notice bordered all in black. He opened it: it conveyed the intelligence of the death of the sculptor, Lucas, in whose studio he had once passed many mad-cap hours. This Lucas had been an odd kind of a man; remaining a sort of antiquated Bohemian in spite of the distinctions and decorations which were bestowed upon him, even by the Institute itself. He was never found at home or engaged on his great works of art that had won for him renown—"A Souvenir of the Army of the Rhine," "The Peasant Soldier," "The Monument of General Barbanegre"—and in which there ran a vein of heroic inspiration, a virile instinct, unless he were also surrounded by a bevy of noisy women, who filled the place with their cackle which had not the least pretence of being edifying. They were all over, on the divans, grouped around the models, with whom they gossipped, or in the little reception-parlor smoking their cigarettes. The house was full of them; they emerged from every corner. There were representatives of every round of the ladder of gallantry: young "actresses" who had never played a part, in experimental toilets; lovely creatures who arrived in turn-outs, and who, the moment they entered the studio, became once more themselves, simple and unaffected; or, some, who were a species of "grisette," and who asked nothing better than to get a start in their "career." They all brought their feminine friends with them, seated themselves, took possession of the studio, chattered, laughed, played like children, listened to the coarse jests which Lucas

got off, while rapidly manipulating the clay, retorted with other follies, acquired a fresh leaven from this liberal atmosphere of gaiety, far removed from brainless foppery. Their cavaliers were forbidden, be it known, to try to obtain a



presentation to the old master. When they remarked: "I am going to spend an hour at Lecas'," it was a claim to inviolability. And if some of their admirers asked an explanation, appeared to be disturbed about this familiarity, they responded with a shrug of the shoulders:

"How silly you are! Lecas—you don't regard him as a man, do you? He cares a deal about love, he does!"

Lecas, however, retained all of the serenity of the artist in the midst of this hubbub, which had finally grown to be a necessity to him, kneading his earth with as much composure as if he were alone, while at the same time he gave vent now and then to simple enormities in the way of jest.

"What do you suppose?" he would ask, when any one expressed astonishment that in the midst of so much tumult he could accomplish works of austere inspiration, and successfully; "I do not drink any more, I do not smoke, my stomach is not strong, I no longer dissipate (he used a quite crude expression here). They amuse me, the young things; they play a symphony for me in the laugh major. It is as much a kind of music as any other."

One day the Minister of Fine Arts, without causing himself to be announced, had come to see that imposing and vigorous group, "The Defence of Chateaudun," which the sculptor was preparing for the nation. He was a very reserved and portentously grave politician, who, after a residence of some fifteen years at the Palais Royal, had still remained extremely provincial, and had never anything but official phrases on his lips.

He was dumbfounded, finding the door of the house open, on being received by a small, fantastic, feminine troupe.

"Ho! ho! Lecas," cried a brazen "missy," with disordered locks, "here's a stunner!"

"Allow me! allow me!" And that was all that the amazed minister could say.

When Lecas came forward, the former questioned him with a scandalized gesture.

"What! Those young things?" cried the sculptor. "Are you astonished, Monsieur? Pshaw! for the little use that they are to me!"

Robert recalled this interior, which he had frequented with

other comrades; he remembered the impromptu soirees, fantastic, tumultuous, in the midst of which, without being in the least incommoded by this unchaining of the prankish spirit, Lecas tranquilly went to sleep for an hour or two, or else, seized with a fever of toil, suddenly began to sketch in a corner. What! the studio was now silent! Was it possible that so many joyous memories had so quickly flown? He thought of all this while he was approaching the Rue d'Assas, where Lecas had lived during his entire career, finally purchasing the property, so as not to be longer annoyed by the complaints of neighbors, whom the noises disturbed.

It was time that he arrived. The last wreath had been placed at the corners of the bier, the last cluster of flowers had been artistically laid upon the black cloth surface of the mortuary car; the procession started, making an avenue through a throng of sight-seers. And, of a sudden, a sort of discipline was established among the other throng, that of the cortege. In the ranks, now forming, an instinctive order of precedence was observed, after the confused mob of the moment before in front of the open door.

Solemn and uncomfortable in his academic coat, which he had felt to be ridiculous, his slender sword trammeling him as if it were a silly plaything, a stout man, nervously twisting his short beard, came forward at a sign from the master of ceremonies, and took one of the ropes attached to the pull. He was much moved, too. You divined in him one of those sturdy manipulators of the clay, who, however illustrious they have become, never feel themselves at home except in their work-a-day jacket. A gentleman of correct mien, with an air of great ennui, very dignified, with a truly funereal face, at once presented himself upon being called, with an ease derived from habit:

"The delegate of the minister!"

Then a well-known deputy, much hurried, flew rather than walked to his post, smiling, gay, elegant, nodding incessantly

right and left, betraying the perpetual desire to please; and an old comrade of the deceased, very sad and sincerely sorrowful, came and placed himself beside the coffin, now oscillating to and fro with the inequalities of the pavement.

"And where are we going?" asked a new arrival, panting, as he joined a group of friends.

"To Montmartre! It seems the Lecas family have a plot there."

"The devil! From the Rue d'Assas to the Boulevard de Clichy—it's a good jaunt."

At the Boulevard des Italiens there was a halt: another funeral procession was passing; they had to wait for it to go by.

"After you—I'll not stir till you do! Dead men's etiquette," said a young painter, who was beginning to find that the enforced gravity of the occasion weighed upon him.

Arrived at the cemetery, the procession wound its way along endless alleys bordered with little chapels, half-covered with moss, on the fronts of which could be read the names of Rochechouart, Mortimer, Villoutreys, Foresta, etc. At an extreme point, after climbing a steep hill, they came upon a picturesque site, where the tombs were less frequent, overlooking the whole extent of the cemetery as far as the eye could reach—a mass of sombre verdure, strewn with white dots, which were the monuments of the dead.

The car stopped in front of a commonplace tomb, of somewhat dilapidated aspect, surmounted by a broken cross, and the bearers lowered the bier into the grave. As those who were following drew near, there was a movement in the crowd. The young women who had frequented Lecas' studio, and who felt their souls immersed in a vague sentimentality, wept continually—and they desired to be seen in the foremost rank.

Then began the series of discourses. The delegate of the minister drew from his pocket a paper neatly folded, from

which he read a colorless official eulogy, dug up from the depths of the dictionary: and it was received with polite nods by the group of members of the Institute and by the lesser lights, happy to pay their court to a man who had something to say about the artistic patronage of the nation. Then a worthy sculptor, perfectly simple in manner, succeeded him and became confused in his harangue, which he had learned by heart, stammered out some few phrases amid a painful silence, and, reddening deeply in face of the throng which was pressing about him, suddenly bethought him to apologize, in a tone so pitiful that it was comical—"not being accustomed to it"—while hands were outstretched to him to abridge his agony.

But a very spruce young man with a certain off-hand grace now approached the tomb; and he spoke abundantly, uttering things most commendable and with an engaging smile. He went a long way back in the history of the world, drew delightful parallels, and apostrophized Donatello and the precursors of Michael Angelo. This lasted for a long quarter of an hour. When a reporter of a journal, pushing his way through the crowd, pounced upon him, note-book in hand, he ejaculated this marvellously unknown name: "Brown."

"Artist?"

"No."

"Author?"

"No."

"Amateur?"

"No!"

And the amiable and mysterious Monsieur Brown withdrew, mingling again in the crowd, which now was a good deal thinned. There was inquiry for "the family," in order to pay it the usual salutation at parting; but there was no family: it was only represented by Lecas' frail young friends, whose sobs had become quite noisy.

"Just look at Laura Rebel," said one of them, pointing to

a young woman who put her handkerchief to her eyes with a despairing gesture; "she would like to have it believed that Lecas— Airs, nothing else!"

The weather was brilliant. The sun, as it rose higher in the heavens, was warm, almost sultry. The distant fogs were disappearing. The cemetery had no longer anything of the tragic gloom about it.

The delegate of the minister having reflected that he could not make his obeisance to those queer "relatives" of Lecas, departed, numerous escorted, and an aged artist who had a bust to dispose of, would not let him escape. "If I could have the pleasure, Monsieur, of taking you along in my carriage!"

Little by little they dispersed; the grave-diggers waited no longer then, but threw the earth in great shovelfuls into the grave, so as to finish the sooner.

The frail young women, having dried their tears, now permitted themselves to be accosted by former frequenters of the studio; old acquaintanceships were resuscitated; there

were invitations to lunch in the vicinity; some of them were accepted on condition that the day should be finished in the open air, for it was too fine to remain in-doors.



Robert was just about going when he was stopped by a tall girl, still very handsome, a former model, whose odd nature had once allured him a moment, with her dead-white complexion, her extraordinarily long black tresses, her Bohemian air, and her candid corruption. She had once on a time had a

little mansion to herself, with a well-appointed household; but one fine morning, finding the gallant "chap" who was infatuated with her a mortal bore, she had given him his

dismissal cavalierly; and taking with her nothing except what she wore, had never set foot again in the house. It was still at her disposal, but she cared little for the constancy of her worthy admirer. Of all the mad-caps who had frequented Lecas' studio, she was the most fantastic, with her rare and superb disdain of things positive, her taste for adventure and bravado, and not the slightest pretence of morality!

"Ah!" she said, "a ghost!"

"Jenny Bracelet! Pshaw!"

And Robert promptly recalled the afternoon frolics at Lecas', the "symphony in the laugh major," as the old statuary called it, the liberty, the comradeship of the studio. Jenny Bracelet! He had loved her seriously for two days. Was it not he who had found for her that surname, assuredly more graceful than the other vocable, Jeanne Touillard, which she had received from her parents—the only present they had ever made her—one day when the idea had occurred to her to figure in a review—in a morbid love of notoriety, a longing to exhibit her exuberant charms in one way or another?

She took Robert's arm without reserve; and he, diverted at finding himself carried back in thought to the queer atmosphere of Lecas' studio, questioned her.

"I? Ah, my dear, I never have any luck. Here I have been obliged to accept another little establishment from another idiot. Decidedly, there is no way of remaining one's own mistress. For the moment, I am trying to habituate myself to this sort of existence! But it is too much luxury. Poor Alfred! I feel that I shall leave the unhappy fellow as I did the other one, who still awaits my return. They will not comprehend that luxury is what kills me, that I would be much more at my ease in a mountebank's cart—as I would. You see, mamma must have been once in love with a gypsy—I have nomadic blood in my veins; I do not want to stay anywhere; I want merely to encamp, that's all. I know it



astonishes my feminine friends, who always like to give me good advice, but what of it? That's just how I am!"

And she went on and on, and Robert laughed as she chattered.

"So you are still the same?"

"Yes; are you?"

"Ah, no!"

"Oh, that's so; you're married, you have settled down. And you love your wife— is she nice?"

"I adore her!"

"And how long is it since this happy marriage?"

"A year and a half, almost."

"Isn't it odd that people can live together so long? For me, I could not do it. And, fancy, that Alfred wants me to marry him, thinking he can have me the better secured. You can imagine whether this ought to help his affair with me. So then, you are happy?"

"Very happy!"

"And not the least ill-temper, not the least misunderstanding?"

"Not the least."

"Then you miss the fun of making up, which is, perhaps, the best thing in love, after all."

"Ah, Jenny, you—indulging in philosophy!"

"No, it is simply experience."

While she was talking, Robert suddenly bethought him. It was true, not the smallest misunderstanding between them, Marie-Ange and him! And what Jenny was saying appeared to him very agreeable, almost tempting. But she did not want to leave him, this fine weather. She forced him to go and take breakfast with her; and they laughed with all heartiness at the remembrance of former frolics.

"Ah, poor Lecas!" said she, "it would please him could he hear us in the dark niche where they have put him. He would enjoy it far better, I am sure, than the discourse of that

ministerial delegate just now. It did not prevent me from weeping in real earnest for him, you know."

"You can weep, then, you?"

"Bless me, why not? Only with me it is different from Laura Rebel, who only weeps when there is some one looking on."

"You are a good girl, always!"

"My heart in your hand, if you wish it. Oh, no! I forgot—you are married!"

"Is it an impertinence?"

"Why no, a compliment."

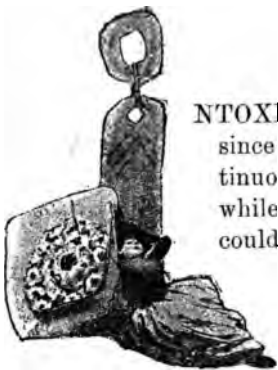
Robert escorted Jenny to a carriage. After she had entered it, he called her back.

"Seriously, if I should ever have need of you—"

"Need of me? What may that mean?"

"I do not know yet."

"I cannot give an address; my address depends on caprice, you know. Pshaw! for people like us, Paris is but a little place: we can always contrive to find each other!"



## XVII.

INTOXICATION with the mystical had long since vanished. But in this sort of continuous exercise, the imagination of Robert, while he pursued his researches for all that could give a spice to love, acquired a singular development. After so many crazy experiments, the passion for the factitious and artificial was not appeased. His fondness for Marie-

Ange, besides, did not change; it was still as warm as ever; it was sincere, as much as anything could be so in this spirit which was haunted by chimeras and intellectual depravity, in which truth and simplicity, little by little, inspired a sort of horror. In the complexity of his sentiments he felt also a certain gratitude towards her, like that of the magnetizer towards a docile subject who lends herself to his experiments. She was for him a precious subject for all the variations that he loved to weave about the theme of passion. Ignorant of the world, submissive to him through the domination of the senses, confiding, having, indeed, no other person to serve her as guide, why should she not follow him in all his fantasies, at first with an amused curiosity, afterwards through habit?

Nevertheless, she sometimes said to him, laughingly:

"You know that you make me afraid!"

Once he was ill for an entire fortnight. His consuming, sensuous egoism was somewhat subdued, and under the oppression of sickness he became simple again, for the moment. Marie-Ange tenderly cared for him, and though she was grieved to see Robert confined to his bed, she could not

help being happy in the more natural fondness which he showed for her. He dolefully thanked her for her indefatigable devotion.

"Ah, Robert," she said, "it is I who would wish to thank you for being *yourself* to-day. Do you know, this calmer affection between us is charming?"

He acquiesced, because he was quaking with fever; but comedy resumed its ascendancy, almost despite him, when he began to grow better. Feeling his strength returning, he experienced a perverse joy in feigning a relapse, with assiduous art, so as to enjoy the disquietude which he could read in Marie-Ange's face; and being very hungry, he heroically endured the pangs of his stomach, refusing to eat, so as to make her believe that his condition was most grave. In the night, he simulated fits of delirium to frighten her, and amidst incoherent words he would utter at hazard the names of women, so as to render her jealous. He was too much inured to this perpetual system of complications to comprehend that Marie-Ange was chiefly alarmed about his condition.

For the rest, through rapidly changing visions, he arrived at a species of ghostly revery. He saw himself stretched upon his couch, dead, his face colorless, his hands crossed upon his breast, wreaths and blossoms thrown on the sheets at his feet, while on a table two tapers were burning above a sprig of boxwood, and a nun in a snowy cap—a nun whom he pictured to himself as still young and very pallid and frail, and somewhat fearful at this, her first death-watch—was reading in an arm-chair in a book of prayers, casting anxious



glances meanwhile at the rigid corpse, at once affrighted and attracted by its immobility. Then Marie-Ange would enter, clothed in black—in mourning hastily prepared—would kneel, heartbroken, or would cover his cold visage with kisses, exhausted, fiercely disdaining consolation, transfigured in her tragic tears.

The sister, pityingly, would try to draw her away from him, using gentle words, uttered in softly indifferent tones; but Marie-Ange would refuse to go, would remain beside the bed, entreating that she be left there alone, forcing the nun to withdraw a little. Then, as if he might hear her, she would speak to the dead; she reminded him of the vanished caresses, the fever of their kisses in the past, the divine raptures of love. And Robert, as by a miracle, could gaze upon her, found her exquisite in her tears, and derived a delicious pleasure from her sorrowful beauty.

“What a pity,” he said to himself, pursuing this voluntary dream, “that I am dead! Never was Marie-Ange so lovely as in this affliction!”

But he suddenly felt bored by his sick role; he consented to return to health. He expected that some day, in a moment of curiosity, Marie-Ange would ask him for some explanation regarding the feminine names which he had allowed to escape him in his illness. But Marie-Ange, infinitely happy in his convalescence, had already forgotten those brief instants of alarm. This absence of jealousy on her part almost wounded him.

Then, by the sheer drifting of his thought, ever somewhat astray, he was led to desire that he might himself feel the pangs of jealousy. Once, by one of his caprices, he had trifled with these torments by imagining them; but he had since grown more difficult; what he now required was the real anguish.

This time he could not take Marie-Ange into his confidence, as before. Whatever good opinion he had of himself, what-

ever confidence he also had in her, the game was certainly a dangerous one, and he did not attempt to conceal from himself the fact of his imprudence. But this very danger was what attracted him.

Oh, to taste such fears as these, with perhaps a semblance of reason; to divine the white lies on Marie-Ange's lips; to follow the progress of this vertigo in her, to read in her heart the emotion which would agitate her, the combats which would be fought within her! And then he would step in just at the decisive moment, amiable, charming, with all his power of seduction; he would put victoriously to flight the image upon which the young woman had, for a moment, in spite of herself, complaisantly allowed her attention to dwell; and in a masterful way he would renew his conquest of Marie-Ange.

But Robert did not desire a prosaic ending. He longed only for real anxieties, with that appetite for peril which the mountain hunter may have who disdains the beaten path for the verge of the precipice.

He again made his appearance in society, from which until then he had kept Marie-Ange somewhat apart; he sought occasions for the display of her beauty. He endeavored to draw about him, at little periodical dinners, given in strict privacy, some of his former joyous comrades, who had remained behind him "on the field of battle." And he curiously sought to guess which among them, with that exquisite delicacy which is habitual in friendly relations of this sort, would make love to his wife. He affected in their presence not to concern himself about Marie-Ange, and he told them in confidence of a love-affair of his own which he would not willingly sacrifice. Then he kept watch.

There were some among them, indeed, who sought to console the young creature whom they believed to be disdained and abandoned. But they were lacking in sincerity, the one thing which might, perhaps, have touched Marie-Ange. They

were ignorant of the real situation; and, with a woman who was very far from desiring to fall, their strategy was fruitless. Their gallantry seemed very insipid to her, after all the follies to which Robert had accustomed her.

Robert thought that he would at least feign the jealousy which he was unable to feel.

"Marie-Ange," he said, one evening, "I beg you to give me a moment of serious conversation."

"Gracious heavens! What is the matter?" she asked.

"I—I—I have sought to defer this explanation, but it has become necessary—you cause me the deepest sorrow."

She gazed at him dumbfounded.

"I?"

"Do you suppose that I have not remarked the attentions which Monsieur d'Avroy has been paying you? There is undoubtedly on your part greater imprudence than there is conscious intent; nevertheless—"

But Marie-Ange burst out into so frank a fit of laughter that he at once comprehended that it would be ridiculous for him to proceed. He found a means of giving the conversation a sportive turn, being obliged to forego the scene of anger and reproaches which he had desired in order to obtain gradually the illusion of real suffering. His self-love, even, could not but be satisfied with the irony with which Marie-Ange had spoken of her admirers. In short, they made it up with each other before they had quarrelled.

"Besides, who was it who brought all of these fine gentlemen here, if you please, who so alarm you of a sudden?"

"I did, I know, and I was wrong."

"Ah, Robert! that is a very serious word."

"Never mind; I'll clear the house of them."

"I assure you, I am not the one who will complain."

Under this plausible pretext, in fact, they ceased to receive. He supposed that Marie-Ange would appear vexed at these precautions, would be bored by the relative solitude to which

he condemned her, after a period of noise and activity. But solitude, on the contrary, was not displeasing to Marie-Ange; and Robert, with the vague need of tormenting her which he now felt, remained much "put out." Yes, he was quite conscious of it; a certain ferocity now blended with his refinements of desire, and in reasoning frankly with himself he was not without some little disquietude.

"Where the devil is this leading me?" he said to himself. But he felt that he had entered upon a descent in which he could no longer check himself. These moments of reasoning were very rare with him, for that matter, and he was hardly the man to indulge in long reflection.

He had made a philosophy unto himself, according to which everything was permitted to him, so long as he took pleasure in thus satisfying his experimental curiosity. Then, he had a presentiment of a day when lassitude would come to him, the acceptance of the commonplace—even the test of the triteness of existence. Who knows? The moment might come, perhaps, when he would even confront the prospect of becoming a father without feeling bored, an eventuality which now caused him a sort of affright. And after a period, the duration of which he did not define, he saw himself settled down, sedate (not like some others, before marriage, but after it), affable and peaceful. Pshaw! there would be time enough to think of all this metamorphosis.



## XVIII.



XTRAVAGANCE unheard of—an idea that suddenly occurred to him one day, and which at once seized hold of him, as usual, to his very marrow !

This time, you may believe, it was difficult of realization. But what new and delicious sensations he perceived in advance ! So much the better if its execution was laborious, if he must engage in a delicate conflict with Marie-

Ange to bring her to subscribe to all that was unheard-of in this plan—the conception of a moment; to triumph over her scruples, which he admitted would be most legitimate; to persuade her to go through this amusing adventure with him; to play, as his accomplice, a long-sustained comedy, fruitful in episode and emotion.

One morning, some trouble which he had in regard to a country property led him to visit his lawyer, Master Lionnet; a lawyer of the new school, elegant, fashionable, a frequenter of “first nights” and the green rooms, a handsome fellow and widely known, who had been his college chum.

Annoyed at some complications which had arisen, Robert went to consult him. At the moment when he was about to send in his card, Master Lionnet happened to be showing to the door a greatly animated personage, who, on retiring, was finishing with liberal gestures the conversation which he had just had with the lawyer.

And Robert caught these words, spoken volubly: “Intoler-

able situation—inconceivable delays—impossible to exist—beg of you—make haste.”

Master Lionnet, with most graceful indifference, promised a speedy solution, reassured him, trifling with his eye-glass the while as he edged him towards the door.

When the client had gone and his anxious shadow was no longer visible, Master Lionnet turned to Robert.

“Hello! what brings you here?” said he, shaking him by the hand. “I suppose you have not come with the same motive as our worthy friend, just now, who conjures me to rid him of his wife?”

“Ah! that’s so—divorce is your specialty.”

“What would you? I am a modern lawyer. I commiserate the heart-aches of pretty women. I have a particular aptitude in cutting the fatal bonds which unite them to husbands who do not understand them. I have a tender heart, man of the law though I am. I can even rejoice at the loss of an action for my client if this outcome is desired by a pretty little darling. Thus the poor fellow who has just left me has every reason in the world for winning his case. His wife deceives him abominably. But zounds! he has shown me her photograph—she is charming. Do what I can, I cannot feel an interest in him. As the wife has everything to lose by a divorce, I do not hurry myself; papers that should have been sent already to the Palace I allow to lie here. Do not repeat this, in any event. And observe that my devotion to her is entirely platonic, that I do not know her otherwise than by her portrait, and that I shall probably never speak to her. But I can not help it. I see in her the victim. She must have been so greatly bored by this ridiculous individual! But come into my office.”

This office of Master Lionnet had nothing austere about it. In the middle of the room, a superb desk of the style of Louis XIV was not overcharged with documents of melancholy aspect. The envelopes of the latter were of a delicate rose-

color. There were mirrors and vases of flowers, and the frightful traditional green paper was replaced by light-colored hangings, figured with small bouquets. In truth, this had neither the air of mildew nor of seclusion.

"You understand," added the lawyer, laughing, "what takes place here is unpleasant enough of itself; there is no need to add to the affliction of my visitors by gloomy decorations. But come, what is it that affords me this pleasure? You have not been married long enough to have recourse to the kind of services which I usually render. So—"

"No," said Robert, "simply a business matter, a trifle about which I desire your advice."

He briefly stated the slight embarrassment in which he found himself, and Master Lionnet quickly reassured him. Then they chatted together, and, while his impatient clients in the waiting-room were becoming exasperated, the lawyer recounted to Robert the story of a joyous hanging of the crane which had taken place the night before at the house of a pretty young creature in whom he was interested.

"By Jove! if I had known your address, I would have sent you a hint; but it is centuries since I have seen you. Do not be such a stranger hereafter. Indeed, pardon me," he added, at the end of a good hour, "I must attend to business."

He accompanied Robert as far as the principal door.

"You know, if ever you want a divorce," he said, in a playful way, "no one but myself must have charge of that little ceremony."

When Robert found himself in the street, he forgot the law, the advocates and red-tape. The weather was passable, and he returned home on foot, loitering as he went.

But as he was mounting the stairway, thinking of nothing in particular, suddenly, by one of those tricks which his imagination played him, he saw himself again in Master Lionnet's office. But this time it was no longer a question of a vulgar matter of business. He was fairly and squarely, like the rest,

in the position of a petitioner for divorce. He, too, demanded a prompt solution, and, strange to say, he continued, nevertheless, to love Marie-Ange. He pleaded his cause with warmth and enthusiasm, though it was at the same time against his conscience, employing admirable and conclusive arguments, of which he felt the falsity. He presaged a very complex condition of mind, a sort of revelry of lies. What was the meaning of this waking dream? It diverted him so much that, still pursuing it while smoking his cigarette, he threaded a second time the sloping walks of the Park Monceau.



"Oh, oh," said he, "it will be a little strong, that will!"

But it was in vain for him to formulate serious objections to himself; this devil of an idea fastened itself upon him: to enjoy the exceptional diversion of a simulated divorce without actually carrying it out, to experience the sensations of a man who is resolved upon, or who is constrained to accept, a supreme eventuality.

He foresaw an infinite pleasure in this semblance of disunion, in the clever mystification of all who should take part in the action—lawyers and magistrates—and, above all, in the secrecy which he would be forced to adopt to continue his tender relations with Marie-Ange while they were believed to be enemies. And it was this that was particularly enticing to him. He invented this unheard-of situation: a couple who adore each other, who are obliged for a time to simulate a serious disagreement, and who, to assure themselves that their fondness for each other does not vary, are forced to overcome a certain vigilance, to make appointments with each other in

obscure places, and to hide their movements from everybody, like guilty lovers.

Certainly he would have to undergo many things that were unpleasant in order to arrive at that period which promised him so much delight ; but no: were all of these formalities so very unpleasant when looked upon from this standpoint ?

Yes; he had got thus far, making light of the fastidious steps which he would interpose: justice would authorize Marie-Ange to quit the conjugal roof while awaiting the result of the trial. She would retire to whatever point she preferred. The law forbade him to follow her, or to seek to rejoin her. She was even armed with the right to employ force against him. It was then that, bearding all vigilance that was set about them, he would go to her clandestinely; he would correspond with her in roundabout ways; he would trifle deliciously with fate.

Then, several days prior to the judgment, the affair—thanks to certain well-considered precautions—having remained secret, he would break off proceedings—he would resume his accustomed life.

Ah ! the ground of the petition ? But that did not embarrass him very long. Doubtless, it would be more zestful for him if Marie-Ange should for a moment believe in the reality of the separation. But he could allege no ground of action against her, that was evident. It was for him, then, to bear the weight of imaginary accusations. That was an easy matter. The next thing, then, was to induce Marie-Ange to formulate a complaint. How ? If it were in earnest, she would refuse, of course. It was indispensable, then, that she should be in collusion with him.

The deuce ! This was something not so easy. Far as she had followed him up to the present, would she go so much farther as this ? He had been right in saying, a few minutes before:

“That will be a little strong !”

But difficulties only spurred him on. After all, there was no hurry about it. No hurry? Ah, what could be more urgent than the realization of a desire?

Meanwhile, he was charming with Marie-Ange; he amused her by his gay amiability. He was watching for his opportunity, with a persistency in his idea amounting to a mania.

It was in paradoxical form that he ventured his first opening in the preliminary skirmishes, while continually bringing back the conversation to the subject of divorce.

"Why!" exclaimed Marie-Ange, "how that question seems to dwell in your mind! One would suppose that you wanted to obtain a divorce yourself!"

"I, my darling?" he responded, hypocritically. "I should be the last person, assuredly, to whom such a thought would come."

"And, besides," added Marie-Ange, laughing, "there would have to be some cause, and on my side—well!"

"Ah! you can always find causes when you wish for them."

"Undoubtedly, but you must wish for them; and I hope it is not so with us."

"No, certainly. And yet, Marie-Ange—"

"Why, you startle me!"

"Do you know that it would be an amusing sport, to measure at a near distance, to sound the melancholy abyss of unhappy wedlock, feeling happy ourselves and sure of each other as we are—"

"Oh! that is—"

"To enjoy the calm of the sea, one must know the terrors of the tempest."

"Oh! oh! your poetic metaphors carry you a little too far!"

"In fact, I was joking."

"That is better—I breathe more freely."

"But you may vainly ridicule my metaphor; I adhere to

it. To be conscious of one's happiness, to comprehend that it is superior to the chances of fortune, to appreciate one's felicity, while able to conceive what the shipwreck of others' illusions may mean, to touch the very verge of the abyss—this must be something more than a merely curious sensation. I maintain that it is almost a useful thing."

"Ah! is suffering indeed necessary that we may enjoy the charm of the present hour? On that plan, we would have to pay dearly for every happy emotion; we could not feel at ease in a perfect state of health without having been previously ill; we could not fill our lungs with pure air without going at once to shut ourselves up in a sewer; we could not permit ourselves to admire a landscape without having previously contemplated some horrible nook in the suburbs, bare and uninviting."

"But that is exactly my theory. However monstrously egotistical this principle may appear to you, I proclaim that we do not enjoy the consciousness of our happiness except by observing other people's apprehensions; that by the spectacle of all that is most to be feared—I say! one day—oh, you will not tell me that I abuse my metaphors—one day I was making the trip from Grandville to Jersey; the sea was raging, abominable, and it shook the packet-boat until it creaked again. What a sad mien was presented by my companions! I heard them groaning in most piteous fashion. By good fortune I had never in my life felt so well, and the cigar which I was smoking seemed to me to be admirable. The sea in its exasperation appeared to me superb, coquettish even in its fury, seductive even in its unbridled rage. Do you suppose my composure, my excellent digestion, the odor of my cigar would have caused me so much satisfaction if this satisfaction had not been based precisely upon the comparison of my enviable lot with the torments of the other passengers?"

"Ah, as for me, I should have pitied those poor people."

"Pardon me, but this is sublimity. That is not in the play.

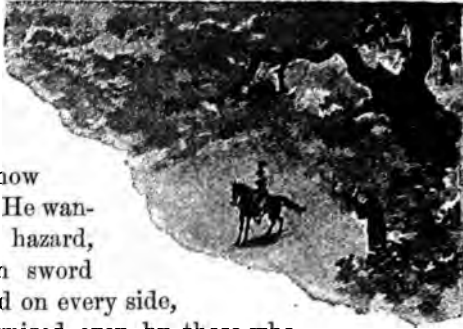
Sublimity is no longer among the possible chords for me. Do you wish an epilogue now?"

"Let's have the epilogue!"

"Once upon a time there was a knight who had fought with honor against the infidels, and who had returned to place his glory as a homage at the feet of a noble lady-castellan, for whose favor he sighed. Every joy, power, renown, love, were his. Lady Yolande, his wife—how does the medieval name strike you?—spent her time in embroidering his exploits in tapestry, at that time the crown of conjugal affection. Now, one day, when he was riding on his palfrey, in an enchanted forest, a wicked fairy suddenly plunged him into a magic sleep."

"On his palfrey?" asked Marie-Ange, sweetly.

"Yes, the fairy had put the horse to sleep, too. And, behold, the poor fellow saw himself suddenly in the worst of plights. He had been driven from his manor by the Saracens, who now took their revenge. He wandered sadly about at hazard, with only a broken sword in his hand, rebuffed on every side, and no longer recognized even by those who had formerly been his friends. And, last and supreme catastrophe, he caught sight at the same time of the Lady Yolande, the chaste Yolande, in the distance, carried off by a handsome page, who had profited by the confusion of the moment to persuade the lady-castellan to elope with him. And she was responding most ardently to his caresses. Then the unfortunate knight uttered such a cry of rage that he awoke, in spite of the spell, and, finding himself, richly attired, on his





caparisoned courser at the gate of his castle, which was still intact, and at a window of which Yolande was still eternally embroidering, according to her custom, he devoutly offered up thanks to Heaven, which had permitted that all this should be but a dream. Recovering his energy, which had grown somewhat mellow, he made on the morrow a levy of armed men and went forth to the accomplishment of new deeds of prowess; not, however, without having previously so well proven his grateful tenderness towards his wife that, as history remarks, a new scion was added to the family-tree some months later."

"Very pretty, your epilogue. But have you been well informed as to the sequel?"

"Oh, as to that, I am positive."

"Because I know another version."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes. When the knight awoke at last, being delivered from his night-mare, it was with much difficulty that he could recover his spirits. He remained greatly depressed, although he might have convinced himself by the reality that he was the victim of an illusion. The possessions which he enjoyed now seemed to him to be precarious. His bad dream pursued him, rendered him restless and melancholy, and it ceaselessly inspired him with a thousand chimerical fears. He no longer looked upon the Lady Yolande's marvellous tapestries except with an absent gaze, and he jealously kept watch on the most innocent of pages who attended upon her. So much so, that his whole life became empoisoned by the memory of that unlucky dream, which explains why the wicked fairy had inspired it."

"Ahem! that is very much to be questioned, that is!"

But all of these argumentations left no precise impression behind them. Although she resisted, Marie-Ange was already at the point to which Robert wished to bring her, so that she would listen to such foolish project as he might propose to

her. He suddenly threw off the mask and, half laughing, half in earnest, caressing, supplicating by turns, putting his arms about the half-affrighted young wife, he said :—

“Suppose we indulge in the comedy of divorce, Marie-Ange?”

She started violently, amazed. She looked at Robert in alarm.

“What is really your thought? What are you concealing from me?”

“I? Why, I swear to you that I adore you, that I have never loved you as I do now! Come, can I speak falsely when I say that to you?”

And he took her hands in his, despite her resistance, and covered them with little kisses, which always made her arms tingle their full length. But there were tears in her eyes, and these tears enraptured him.

“Robert!” said Marie-Ange, “you know that I have done all that you have wished, thus far, not without a certain uneasiness at times. I have been less your wife, perhaps, than your accomplice, paying with regret and apprehensions for each of my compliances with your caprices, though I have submitted to them joyfully, it is true; but I entreat you, respect me a little. Never talk to me of this absurd child’s play again. Never; do you hear? I cannot suffer it.”



“Zounds!” said Robert, not disconcerted, “how becoming indignation is to you. You are lovely at this moment, to one’s heart’s desire, do you know it?”

He went and brought a small glass, forcing her to look at herself in it, whether she would or no, joking her about this warm outburst of rebellion and complimenting her on the brilliancy which a moment of animation had given to her countenance, and he went about it in such a way that he led

her very gently to laugh, herself, at the great anger in which she had indulged a little while before.

She laughed. This was a great deal. The seed of the idea was there. Nothing now remained but to cause it to bear fruit. A mania is contagious. He knew what the enveloping magic of the will can do; and his own was tenacious, when it was prompted by his desires.

## XIX.



NDEAVOR as she would to resist it, Marie-Ange could not check the progress of this idea in her own thought. Little by little, she weakened before these earnest entreaties, and Robert, who had still a great empire over her, used every art of seduction to win her to his designs. He told her of the pleasure of a long course of dissimulation, rewarded in secret, an unchanging

tenderness, the voluptuous task of convincing one's self that it was after all only play. He described the caresses which they would exchange—despite all outward appearances—as dearer, more deliciously flavored than any other; the increasing fondness, also, underneath the semblance of hatred which they would manifest towards each other, and the earnest conciliatory efforts of the President of the Court, who would, as required by law, exhaust every argument prior to the grand debate to put a stop to the suit. He affirmed that their love would grow stronger in consequence of this test. He swore, too, that this folly should be the last.

“Yes, after this, we shall behave ourselves; we shall settle down; we will become domestic.”

For that matter, things were to go only so far as they really wished, without danger of scandal, without anything that could be unpleasant to Marie-Ange. And thus, returning incessantly to the charge, he could feel that she was yielding day by day; he knew that curiosity was awakening within

her ; and this curiosity was the best auxiliary which he could have in an acquiescence in this project.

He took advantage, besides, of her ignorance of the Code to assure her that the necessary formalities were not so complicated as they appeared: and thus he saw her scruples little by little abate. At last, with a certain apprehensiveness not unmixed with sweet allurements, she plunged into the adventure. Robert exercised a continual power of suggestion over her, and she was fully aware of this fascination, to which her will gave way ; but her self-abandon was a pleasure now, though she still experienced a sort of tremor at the thought of the perils towards which she was hastening, although what was desired by this terrible yet charming man, whom she could only obey, seemed to her little short of infernal. Thus, once more, Robert had the best of it, despite her early refusal. She experienced a little confusion, a little shame within herself ; yet she was prepared now, nevertheless, to accept what at first had seemed monstrously impossible. yielding to the sensuous fascination of this comedy.

Then they seriously discussed the means which were to be employed. There was no question but that Robert ought to appear to be wholly in the wrong ; and with an earnestness which would surely have greatly astonished any one who might have chanced to hear it, he enumerated the grievances which Marie-Ange was supposed to have against him.

"No, I cannot have beaten you—that is impossible. Let us leave aside entirely the chapter of 'cruelty and serious injuries'—anything that they like but that. I do not want to appear to have acted like a brute to a sweet little woman like you. There remains, then, only the proof of infidelity."

"Oh !"

"Let us understand each other. The guilt is to be mine, as a matter of course. Yes, I am an abominable fellow ; I have deceived you. What enrages me is that this is a confession of asininity ; for tell me, where can I find any one who

is your equal? I must avow, then, that I am a great ass, which will be at once apparent to the presiding judge when he sees you; but there are infatuations of this sort, you know. Besides, have you done all in your power to detain me at home?"

"I!"

"Come, you are already forgetting your part. Yes, there are infatuations of this sort. In love, as in all else, we leave the substance for the shadow. My case, then, is very simple: I have allowed myself to be found in company with—"

"In company with whom? Ah! Now you really alarm me."

"A pure formality, my dear. There are kind creatures enough who will not refuse to do a service to a gallant man—to lend themselves to the semblance of an offence as a mere matter of proof."

"Oh, the horrid idea! What! I must stoop to take into my confidence a commissary of police?"

Robert reflected a moment.

"By heaven!" said he, "since we shall content ourselves with only the preliminary emotions of a divorce, without going through the whole thing, we may avoid that step; a few witnesses will answer, just to repeat what we want them to say. Besides, to reassure you entirely, I shall plot the 'details of the crime' in your presence with my pretended accomplice."

"In my presence?"

"Why, yes; it will be immensely amusing," added Robert, with a burst of gaiety, thus seeking to divert his mind from the audacity of the enterprise upon which he was bent. Had such a thing ever been conceived before? the husband, the wife, and the—she who was to figure as the accomplice—quietly arranging the drama of infidelity which the law exacted, so that it would suggest the greatest probability, while

at bottom there was nothing but what was quite harmless in it?

“But you cannot think of doing that—exposing me to an interview with such a creature!”

“But the one whom I have in mind—”

“Ah, you have already selected somebody, then!”

“A former companion, a fantast, who amuses herself with incongruities.”

He had just bethought him of his meeting with Jenny Bracelet at the burial of Lecas. No one better than she, true Bohemian as she was, could lend herself to this intrigue. When it suited her, Robert knew that she could be quite reticent. For her benefit, he imagined an explanation which would produce the impression of a serious divorce, to be procured on a friendly basis, by expeditious means. He could answer for her; she would raise no objection.

But this new purpose of Robert's bewildered Marie-Ange. And he, as if merely relating an adventure, went on to elaborate it with great vim and spirit. He talked without pause; pre-arranged everything; assigned each one to his or her part. In reality, however, he was conscious of the enormity of the idea of this interview, which had suddenly presented itself to him; yet he clung to it obstinately, finding in this very fact a most exquisite intoxication. All the same, he comprehended that this time he must not leave to Marie-Ange, whose inmost being was in revolt, the leisure for reflection.

He sent, without her suspecting it, a despatch to Jenny Bracelet, whose address he had hastily procured; she had not relinquished her little establishment yet. He appointed a meeting at the Hotel des Reservoirs, at Versailles, for the morrow. Without giving her any explanation, he invited her to dine with him, informing her that he should not be alone.

In brief, he induced Marie-Ange the next day, by the most innocent arguments in the world, to spend the afternoon at Versailles. It was not yet the season when there was much

risk of meeting one's acquaintances. He confessed that, for this strange escapade, it was quite as well that they should not be recognized.

He engaged a small parlor in the hotel, and, after a short promenade, he took Marie-Ange thither. He was a little agitated underneath it all, almost nervous, with an intense anxiety, however, lest Jenny Bracelet should not come.

Laughing, joking about a score of things, he made her sit down.

"Ah! Why are there three places?" she asked suddenly, looking at the table, which was already set.

"H'm! That is my secret."

"Will you explain this enigma to me?"

"Perhaps we are expecting some one."

"Some one? You have invited a gentleman?"

"A gentleman? It is hardly the word."

Marie-Ange arose, a spark of anger giving a charming animation to her countenance.

"You will inform me, my dear."

At this moment a waiter entered. He said to Robert that a lady had asked for him.

"Show her up, if you please," said he; then, turning to Marie-Ange: "Come, now, didn't we agree upon it? It is our accomplice."

She started; then, as if through modesty, she quickly lowered her veil over her eyes.

"And you imagine," said she, "that I am going to support the part that you do not dread to have me play? You can see this—young woman, if it pleases you. As for me, I warn you—"

She had not the time to finish. There was the rustling of a dress, then the door opened. Jenny Bracelet entered with a saucy gait, her nose in the air. Marie-Ange suddenly sprang behind a screen, feeling her heart beat as if it would burst its walls.



Jenny stood without a word, on perceiving this feminine outline, which concealed itself at her approach.

"Really," said she, "what is the matter here? Am I invited to be a spectator of one of your love affairs?"

Robert placed a finger upon his lips. This gesture called for a little moderation, some slight decorum, the dropping of the familiar tone.

"My dear Jenny," he said, "I have permitted myself to appeal to your friendship under circumstances of great gravity."

Jenny gazed in the direction of the screen, much puzzled, wondering who it was who was hidden there. She still believed it to be a practical joke. However, Robert's gravity, his reserved attitude greatly surprised her, for she had expected to find herself in joyous company. As for Robert, though he could not help being a little embarrassed, he was delightfully amused by the many suggestive aspects of this situation, the most singular, certainly, in which he had ever found himself.

Feigning a melancholy attitude, he said:

"My dear girl, this is not a time for laughter. I have a service to ask of you. I could not address myself to any one else."

"It is no wonder, then, that I am selected," she responded, in her usual free and easy manner, in spite of her anxiety to observe what was going on behind the mysterious screen. Then, tired of waiting for an explanation, she interrupted:

"First of all, who is there?"

There was a brief silence. "My wife," replied Robert, gravely.

"Ha!" cried Jenny, severely affrighted.

"Motives, into the details of which I have no right to enter," Robert pursued, with an affectation of solemnity, "oblige us to separate, however much it may be to my sorrow, though there is no cause of mutual reproach, one against the

other. A divorce suit is about to be begun. But the reasons which we might allege, decisive though they may be for us, would very likely not be accepted by a tribunal. It is therefore necessary that we should simulate a fault committed by myself, in order to be within the required conditions, so as to allow my wife to gain her petition, based on a pretended amour which I have kept up. It is important, in order to gain time, in order to press the matter forward to a solution that will fill me with despair, but which I recognize as most urgent, that everything should be clearly established, that my pretended offences should not provoke the shadow of a doubt; that the affair, as they say at the Palace, should be 'limpid.' Am I right in counting upon your friendship to aid me in playing this comedy, so painful to myself, before the eyes of justice?"

"I understand. You are in search of some one who has nothing to lose by way of being compromised. Again you are polite—you are!"

"I am in search of a person sufficiently discreet, sufficiently devoted to a friend of other days, to appreciate a distressful situation."

"Good! From the moment that you appeal to my heart—But gracious! I did not expect this!"

She still turned her eyes in the direction of the screen.

"In order that there might be perfect loyalty as between my wife and myself," continued Robert, "I have wished, though such a step may again appear singular, that she should be present at this interview. A simple business interview, you see, friend Jenny. I desire—to the end that she shall not suspect me—that it shall be stipulated, even, in her presence; that there is to be nothing between us save the merest appearance."

"Sapristi, my dear, you have insisted upon that enough—it is understood. In the first place, perhaps you think that you suggest cheerful thoughts with your air of an under-

taker. Never mind, I can't get over it, and I have seen many an adventure, in every guise, too!"

Marie-Ange listened, completely at a loss. But to her first confusion succeeded a burning curiosity, making her forget all else. She would have fled, no doubt, could she have done so; but perhaps she did not regret, now, that this flight was no longer allowable. The violent emotion which caused her to tremble all over was not without a certain charm. She admired, too, in spite of it all, Robert's astonishing facility in falsehood, creating an entire romance in an instant, inventing strange dissensions with so much naturalness, with such a semblance of earnestness—and a little nervous laugh arose to her lips. Finally, since she was now embarked in this prodigious adventure, she, little by little, assumed her part in it; under Robert's influence, her right sense, her clearness of intellect abandoned her once again, and she submitted as if she were vanquished, hypnotized.

Jenny walked to and fro in the little parlor, greatly undecided, a little perplexed, though not lacking in self-possession, and casting an anxious glance at her attire, which—she did not know precisely why—she would like to have had a little less showy, more simple.

She broke the silence, which was somewhat constrained, with a jest that was just a little forced.

"Anyhow," she said, "all this can be discussed at dinner. It is not that I am hungry," she went on. "Disclosures like that—bless me! They curtail the appetite. But all the same, we can't spend the time in this way, staring at each other. I am your accomplice—all right, since it must be so. Ah, the appearances that I have to keep up in the world—I! Anyhow, if we sit down to the table we shall find something better to talk about, perhaps. All the same—your wife here! That's an idea that I should not have had."

Marie-Ange listened. She was grateful to the woman for the delicacy that prompted her to address these few words to

her behind the scenes, whereby she seemed to excuse herself. A keener desire took possession of her to see this Jenny, who, with her cavalier ways, still maintained a certain species of tact.

At this moment, Robert came after her. The two young women blushed as they caught sight of each other, but it was Jenny who blushed most deeply.

"Come!" said Marie-Ange to herself, with a decisive, plucky little gesture. For that matter, she admitted that she was captivated, through this taste for the abnormal that had developed within her, by the mad folly of this triangular dinner-party.

She inclined her head slightly, though at the same time without haughtiness. She had nothing to do, now, but to play her part. She said, in a voice which was ill-assured :

"Thank you, Mademoiselle."

Jenny knew not what to answer just then. To keep herself in countenance, and in order to have something to say, she glanced down at her dress, which was rather "loud" in its style, and murmured awkwardly:

"If I could have known—"

There was a somewhat ingenuous proffer of respect in this movement which touched Marie-Ange. Robert had not deceived her, then. She was a good girl, this Jenny Bracelet.

Delighted with the success of his insensate project, Robert, despite his own studied gravity, diverted by this unheard-of encounter which he had plotted so tenaciously, motioned them to their seats. The dinner had been ordered and was served. but they scarcely touched it. Jenny remained on her guard, cast sly glances at Marie-Ange, and found her charmingly graceful and simple.

But it was she who, in sheer embarrassment, first attacked the question.

"I imagine," she said, "that Madame is in haste to conclude an interview which cannot be over-agreeable to her.

Oh!" she added, upon a gesture, barely perceptible on the part of Marie-Ange, "I understand well enough how painful it is to you. My stars! You'll admit that it's not my fault. But I swear to you, at least, and you may believe me, that I'll keep your secret, as you must wish me to do."

"You are very good, Jenny," said Robert.

"Well, then, you are to separate. Why? It is nothing to

me; and you require a strong motive for the divorce. I am the motive. Good. I will lend myself to everything you wish, not much flattered, perhaps, by the preference in such a case: but still, I do not reason. How shall we proceed?"

"My goodness!" said Robert, "I do not think it necessary that we should be quite caught in the act."

"Ah, so much the better, then!"

"I will appoint a meeting with you, some day, in some place—anywhere, provided that it is not much frequented at this season; at the hermitage of Villebon, for instance,

in such sort that the waiters may identify you when their testimony is called for. We breakfast out-of-doors in an arbor—very ostentatiously. Then we separate, after I have publicly kissed you, if you will permit it. It is important, my dear," he added, turning to Marie-Ange, who was anxiously interested, just as one might be at a harrowing, yet attractive play. And, at the same time, she was obliged to restrain herself, so as not to smile.

She bowed, in token of assent.

"And then?" inquired Jenny.



"And then, that is all!"

"All?"

"It is sufficient. But—and this is the reason why I desired my wife to be present, that she may be assured that I consent in good faith to the separation which she exacts, even while I deplore it. It is also necessary that amid the avalanche of legal testimony which is to crush me, there should be some letters in your hand. Please be good enough to write me, right here, one or two notes, in the clearest possible terms, so that the judges can have no doubt as to the nature of our relations. Madame here will take them with her and make such use of them as she may desire. I insist upon furnishing her with the most ample weapons against myself."

"I appreciate the honorableness of your attitude, Monsieur," replied Marie-Ange, still a little dazed by the singularity of the situation, yet now playing her part with a greater relish for the humorous side of it.

Jenny remained dumfounded. "That's stunning, all the same!" she murmured, losing somewhat—so great was her surprise—the noble air which she sought to maintain. And she added: "And before Madame?"

"Since it is only a matter of supposition."

"But I can find nothing to write."

"We will help you."

Robert filled Jenny's glass with champagne, and taking a writing-pad from the chimney-piece, placed the pen in her fingers.

"I beg you—"

"But what do you want me to write?"

"Is it repugnant to you just to imagine for a moment that I am your lover?"

"No, not particularly; and yet—"

She bent her head over the paper, turning the pen over and over.

Robert and Marie-Ange exchanged a quick glance, very

little in harmony, to be sure, with the occasion, and in which there was a passionate warmth, the glowing brightness of their strong young love, the gleaming of desire. From that moment, Marie-Ange was Robert's slave. She had henceforth no other will than his.

"Well?"

"Wait a little," said Jenny, "it does not come to me at all."

"Let's see. Would you have any objection to this commonplace commencement, 'My dear Robert'?"

"Bless me, no!"

She wrote; then she stopped. "What next?" she asked.

"Suppose that I have missed an appointment."

"Oh, the coxcomb!" she cried, a little weary of the gravity which weighed upon her.

"Alas! It is not a time for laughter," said Robert, in a gloomy tone. "Let us find some form or other, I pray you."

Again he poured out some wine for her and she drained the crystal cup. Then she wrote some lines at hazard and Robert read them aloud:

"'My dear Robert:

"'Why did you not come yesterday? I expected you the whole afternoon. The time seemed so long to me. Do you not love me any more? I must see you to-day.'"

"Somewhat sentimental," said Marie-Ange.

"We might accentuate it," said Robert, with perfect coolness. And he dictated:

"'Have you forgotten all of our caresses?'"

"A little silly, perhaps, but it is explicit. That is one."

"Must there be very many?"

"No; three or four. A little champagne, my dear?"

He amused himself now by exciting her a little. Jenny had a degree of cleverness. It returned to her now as she became less timid. Finally, she felt quite at ease as she grew accus-

tomed to the incongruous situation, and she wrote a very droll letter; she drank the little tumblers of bubbling wine that Robert poured out for her with an off-hand air and without thinking. The fourth letter, recalling some pretended memories, came very near being spicy.

"The gradation is perfect. It's as natural as—"

"Gracious me!" said she; "I'll not answer for my spelling."

"All the better. Incorrect spelling in love-letters is an aggravating circumstance."

Jenny laid down the pen, handed the letters to Robert, who read them, and then passed them over to Marie-Ange.

"I consider," said he, "that there is not the shadow of an ambiguity in the terms employed; is there? They establish the very grave accusation that must be brought against me. You could not have dotted the I's more carefully."

"Quite so. I am grateful to Mademoiselle for the zeal with which she has made it appear that there was really an attachment; which, I readily admit, it would be easy to understand."

Comprehending that there was no longer any great reason for her to remain, Jenny put on her gloves and made ready to go. But the champagne she had drunk so heedlessly, egged on by Robert, having first exhilarated her, now caused her sudden fits of tenderness.

She gazed at the young married couple, who, according to the situation as she understood it, must soon part, with the air of the old woman of the stage whose rôle it is to distribute blessings.

"So," said she, "you are really decided? You are so nice, both of you—it positively pains me. So there are very serious differences between you."

"Very serious."





"And there is no way of arranging them? You are sure? Each of you could not make a little sacrifice?"

Robert, who could hardly *restrain* himself from an outburst of gaiety at this unexpected epilogue of the dinner—Jenny Bracelet preaching morality—maintained an attitude of heart-broken resignation.

"No way—no way. You see, Jenny, there is nothing more fatal than to have no fault to find with each other."

"I don't very well understand, but I should like to see you reconciled. Yes, Madame," she added, addressing Marie-Ange, "you look like a good, brisk, decided little wife. He, I assure you, is not so bad a fellow at bottom."

The cause of Robert, pleaded by Jenny! He had not dared to dream of this crowning relish of the feast that he had contrived.

"Anyhow," she continued, "you are big enough, after all, to take care of yourself. Give me the word when you shall have need of me. I leave you. But, nevertheless, if I had known what you expected of me, Robert! Good-bye. Madame, your servant!"

So she departed, filling the air with her giddy prattle, half-laughing, half-emotional, no longer knowing exactly what she was about. They heard her descend the stairway, get into a carriage, and drive away. Robert, all of a glow, bursting with merriment, discreetly bolted the door, and, while she also was quivering with nervous laughter, clasped her in his arms.



## XX.



IGHTLY stroking his fine blonde moustache with a gesture that was full of elegance (for he left it to the old school to wear the classical mutton-chops), the lawyer had risen at Robert's entrance.

"There," said Master Lionnet, "you have come just in time. I have received tidings of your affair. Oh, you are lucky to have such a friend as I. We are carrying it with a high hand! To-morrow at one o'clock the session of conciliation will take place. You will have to submit to a little sermon by Monsieur Guyon-Destouches, the President, which, if you wish it, I can recite to you beforehand, for he rarely varies in his formula, the good man! Have no fear, the pomp of the occasion is not too oppressive. After which, unless your wife changes her mind, we shall obtain the provisional separation."

"Since I have told you that the real reasons of our divorce are not those that she alleges: you must have perceived that I am the one who am trying to break this oppressive bond. I have confided all to you; at your dictation I drew up her petition. Marie-Ange is the most virtuous and the most estimable of women, but we cannot live together."

"Yes, under the old legislation, it is what we would call incompatibility of temper. Good gracious! When you were here to see me that other time, the devil take me if I would have believed that you had arrived at that point after eighteen months of married life!"

"Alas! my dear boy."

Robert had imagined this other fable for the benefit of

Master Lionnet. Without being too explicit, he had allowed him to surmise conflicting characteristics and principles as between Marie-Ange and himself, making life insupportable. After that, in order to conciliate the law, which insists upon facts and comprehends nothing relative to psychological subtilities, he had accepted the imaginary positive grievances which Marie-Ange was supposed to have against him. Master Lionnet, to whom nothing in this line was unfamiliar, had indicated to him the most speedy course to pursue under these conditions. He employed all the greater diligence in guiding him through this labyrinth of judicial formalities, as he had once or twice had a glimpse of Marie-Ange, and as she had seemed to him to be charming, and as, according to his private rule of conduct, he was always inclined to take the side of the wife. Since this divorce appeared to be desired by Marie-Ange, his gallantry, then, made it his duty to hasten the solution.

"So," said the lawyer, "you do not even defend yourself."



"No, I am a cynic—within the bounds of good breeding, be it understood. It is not forbidden?"

"On the contrary, it is more piquant. And the sharer of your infidelity is Jenny Bracelet. And, really now, has there been

nothing between you?"

"Nothing—for years past.

"I know her by sight. She is an odd girl. Highly flavored, but a little too Bohemian. All the same, you'll present her to me afterwards, will you not?"

"If you wish. A lawyer, with his ordinary relations, might be lacking in such a one for his collection. Only, look out, with those Bohemians."

"Oh, as for me, I am never infatuated. My profession forbids it."

"Yes, you are a nice fellow, you are; you make love, but you never fall in love."

"Say, rather, that I am prudent; I taste of the good things without getting intoxicated. But let us return to yourself. The barrister whom I have procured for your wife is a clever fellow, a specialist like myself, who will spare you as a man, while demolishing you as a husband. But we are not so far as that yet. It cannot be helped: there are certain delays to which we must submit. The permission granted to your wife to dwell apart from the conjugal hearth will procure for you your first satisfaction."

"You will not allow the affair to be known until the last moment?"

"It is understood. We have means of effecting that for our distinguished clients," said Master Lionnet, bowing jestingly to Robert. "I shall at least see a little more of you when you are free."

"Of course!"

The next day, at one o'clock, Robert and Marie-Ange rode in a carriage as far as the Pont-au-Change, and after the last mutual recommendations, parted, so as to enter the Palace of Justice separately. Marie-Ange no longer made the slightest objection; she allowed herself to be carried forward, ready for anything, dominated, fascinated once more by Robert, who gave her, as it were, a second nature, and succeeded in attuning her to his own artificial sentimentality, delighting in emotions even as in pleasure.

Robert was the first to enter the great hall, where about a dozen persons were waiting, some of them scandalously near to each other, in spite of their differences. Marie-Ange followed. They saluted each other ceremoniously, and then seated themselves upon the wooden benches.

There was one young woman who was unable to hide her tears, and upon whom her husband gazed from afar, smiling

indifferently, an insipidly handsome husband who had the air of



a perfect scamp. The face of the poor, desolate one bore the ravages of a tragic grief. Marie-Ange did not remove her eyes from her, surmising here a

lamentable story; and with a little thrill she thought of Robert, who was there before her, so charming, so amiable, so seductive.

Other badly-assorted couples waited patiently, apparently resigned. Lawyers' clerks, loaded with papers, came and went, beset by interested persons who questioned them and to whom they responded somewhat brusquely.

Master Lionnet had not yet arrived. At last he appeared, ever gracious, elegant, and assiduous, even at the Palace. He had for Marie-Ange a well-turned remark, linked with discreet compliments which he hardly seemed to utter; congratulating himself upon his ability to be useful to her, yet deploring the circumstances under which his good offices were of avail. And about all this there was both the scent of the madrigal and the odor of red-tape. With his usual diligence, he spoke a word or two to a court-officer, who returned after an instant, having obtained a special hearing, and summoned Robert.

"Yes, the husband first," said Master Lionnet; "the law is not polite. Yet he may yield you his place."

Then Robert stepped back, allowing Marie-Ange, whose heart throbbed not a little, to enter a melancholy-looking room with the inevitable green paper on the walls and a repellent book-case at one end. At the approach of this moment, so voluptuously desired, Robert felt an exquisite emotion.

By the presiding judge, who was seated there behind the table, by his co-judges, who were running over some legal

papers, he was supposed to have disdained and outraged this charming woman, who demanded against him the application of the Code. And he adored her, and he knew that he was loved by her, and just now they had again exchanged the wildest kisses ! And not one of those judges who were about to pass upon their future existence had perspicacity enough to surmise that all this was a farce.

The entrance of Marie-Ange—Robert could feel it—did not fail to produce a little sensation. Of these five magistrates, two were old men; the others, at a pinch, might have cut some figure in society. Despite their frigid attitude, from the height of their official situation, which gave them the right to be impertinent, they scrutinized her narrowly. And Marie-Ange was conscious of the gaze of one of them more than of the rest, a little man with a reddish beard and a highly-colored, apoplectic complexion, who dissected her with remarkable freedom.

But Monsieur Guyon-Destouches was in a hurry. He merely cast his eyes absently upon Robert and addressed himself at once to Marie-Ange. He read her complaint.

“ You adhere to this, Madame ? ” he asked.

She inclined her head, somewhat confused.

“ And you, sir, what have you to say ? ”

“ I cannot but admit the facts,” said Robert, with a slightly quizzical intonation.

Then, without waiting further, Monsieur Guyon-Destouches, with an indifference that was plainly prodigious, entered upon a little discourse, wherein, by force of a venerable judicial habit, he did not disdain an occasional epigram, ponderous and laborious though it might be. And certain words would recur : “ Divorce—a grave matter—ahem !—a hazard to run—the present is the present—ahem ! but the future is the future.” And citations : “ Remember the fabulist—the fear of what is bad—ahem !—leads us into worse.”

Marie-Ange listened, somewhat amazed by so much triteness. Who knows ? If this man, instead of merely accom-

plishing his perfunctory task, had moved her, had said things which were just, touching, paternal, her heart might have melted; she might have felt ashamed of the part that she was playing. But she was vexed that arguments so puny, so stereotyped, that counsel so threadbare and empty should be employed. It was as if a challenge had been thrown at her. She became emboldened, with a little touch of anger; by way of bravado, she curtly declared that she persisted in her demand.

Meanwhile, Robert's haughty attitude had finally disposed the President against him. He denounced his conduct in solemn terms, losing sight somewhat, the while, of the question of conciliation. But he bethought himself of it again and proceeded to exhort him to an expiation of his offences.

"You have your life before you, in which to obtain your pardon, sir, to return to a better sentiment, to redeem your fault, instead of continuing your dissipated existence." Then he touched upon another string: "Come, you are an intelligent man, educated, accomplished, egad! There is yet time for you to take a better course." And whatever he said, it was all the same to this worthy Monsieur Guyon-Destouches.

"Then, Madame," he concluded, "you will not consent to an arrangement?"

"No," said Marie-Ange, exasperated against him.

Robert could have kissed her for that "No," so insolently pronounced. How he loved her, his little Marie-Ange, his pupil, his disciple, who had so well profited by his lessons, who told her white lies now as cleverly as he did, who filled so marvellously the character which his caprice had caused her to assume! This examination was a great treat to him. It was a paroxysm of refined delights. While others thought them to be enemies, while others were preparing to put the barrier of the law between them, he was saying to himself that he had never before so treasured his wife as he did now. Oh, that "No"! He was repaid for all his trouble, for all his long efforts to create this incredible situation. And

a contemptuous pity arose in his heart for these judges, who thought to separate him from Marie-Ange, to defend her against him. For judges, thought he, we should have men who have seen something of life, not mere pretentious interpreters of the Code! And he constructed a complete theory all to himself. To determine the differences which are due to the passions, he would have former men-about-town, superannuated Parisians who had frankly led a debauched life, who had seen and tested "all that was going," who knew every corner of Paris; upon these, as an indemnity for the experience that they had so dearly acquired, he would bestow the judicial robe. Such as they, yes, such as they might bestow equitable sentences, might appreciate what was due to impulse, what to fatality, in conjugal warfare. But these others!

He would have preferred that the session should not terminate so quickly. In the first place, Marie-Ange, with her semblance of anger and in the somewhat severe toilet which he had himself insisted upon devising for her—this appearance in the chambers of the magistrate, was delicious. He enjoyed her gestures, her words, her silence, that whole atmosphere of falsehood and artifice which he had accumulated about him. He thought what would be the amazement of these grave counsellors had they been permitted to read his thoughts; and a smile played about his lips, despite him.

"On so serious an occasion, Monsieur," said Monsieur Guyon-Destouches, severely, "you could at least preserve a serious demeanor."

Robert and Marie-Ange withdrew, after saluting each other. Five minutes later they met again near the bridge.

"Ah, Marie-Ange, how well you did your part! Ha! This odor of the Palace, those crabbed old judges, that hideous green cabinet, is it not charming to think that it is all a mere dream? that it is nothing, after all, but a mere game?"

"Ah!" said Marie-Ange, feeling fatigued, now that she could compose herself, "but it is a dangerous game, all the same!"



## XXI.



QUIETLY the days slipped by. Thanks to the zeal of Master Lionnet, many formalities had been abridged. One morning Marie-Ange received information that by virtue of a decision of Monsieur Guyon-Des-touches, President of the [Third] Chamber, she was authorized to return provisionally to her family. She had the right, as the lawyer explained, "to appeal to the police" should her husband

venture to accost her or to follow her or attempt to effect an entrance into her abode.

Robert had thought that Marie-Ange would be left free to choose her own residence. This explicit designation disconcerted him a little, for a moment. As for her, the fever of emotion that had taken possession of her being somewhat allayed, she had besought him to renounce at once the continuation of this romance.

"Break off the suit now, just when the situation promises the most charming sensations!" cried Robert. "You could not mean it! It will be time enough on the eve of the judgment."

He at once elaborated a new plan. She should depart. He would follow and join her in some obscure town. For a time they would travel under assumed names. And it would be divinely amusing to think that, while thus demonstrating as much as possible to each other their mutual tenderness, measures were being pursued at the Palace to disunite them. Then they would return. Marie-Ange would hide somewhere

in the suburbs of Paris, and he, while feigning isolation, would go clandestinely to see her, as if it were a case of forbidden love.

"Do you wish it?" said Marie-Ange once more, much agitated.

"I do," responded Robert. And so she set forth.

It was now Tuesday. She had started on Monday. Robert expected a letter from her which should fix a time and a place of meeting, which should give him news of her. With his usual fondness for the abnormal, this short absence was not displeasing to him. It added new zest to his passion. But how did it happen that Marie-Ange did not write, did not even send him the promised despatch?



Still another day rolled by: then two. At last, the hoped-for letter reached him. He first reconnoitered it laughingly: "Oh," said he, "it is long. She is bored to death already, the poor darling."

He broke the seal, read it, read it with anxious attention, skimmed the lines so as to get to the end more quickly, and then he remained as if thunderstruck, dazed, confounded.

This is the letter:

"ISLE OF THE MONKS, Saturday.

"Robert, I want to talk to you seriously. Listen, my dear friend, judge me, but do not blame me if I give you pain. Remember, it was yourself who wished that we should separate, and that I repeated to you that the game which amused you so was a dangerous one. So long as I was subject to your influence, my poor Robert, so long as you were by my side, I had not the strength to assert myself. But now, being alone, I have reflected, I have thought; my eyes are opened. I condemn myself also, believe me, and I have had

my share, I confess, in the course of evil which ends now in a bitter awakening. The law has separated us pending the final rupture of our union. Well, I have not the heart to forego the rights that you have accorded me against yourself.

"I arrived in my little Isle at that uncertain hour when the day is dying. As when you first appeared before me, the departing sun had set the sea aflame, had streaked the horizon with crimson. But it did not appear to me to be half so glorious and magnificent as it did then. The vanishing of the day-star filled me with melancholy. It seemed to me that much of my spirit had vanished with it, foundering in the abyss amid the blood-stained waves. Might not this impression have been a presentiment? My dear, I am superstitious. On returning to the house my eyes were filled with tears, and it was not your absence, either—though fain would I have persuaded myself that it was so—that caused them to rise from my heart. I wept—for nothing, for the sake of weeping, because it seemed to me that I had grown suddenly old, that I was very tired, that my past, but of yesterday, was very distant.

"Our little house at the Point made an indifferent impression upon me at first, I own. It is not pretty, and it has remained uncouth, standing as it does amid the rocks. Do you remember our old servant, Pasq? She is much broken now. She was a good deal surprised at seeing me, and very happy, too. She talked to me in Breton and I no longer understood her. I was a little ashamed of it, and I saw that it pained her. I asked in the neighborhood for news of my father. The Captain, who had thought of returning, is still extending his voyage, despite what he wrote to me.

"I was worn out. Fancy that I slept straight through the first night without dreaming, and very soundly, too. The weather the next day was radiant. From my bed, I could see the sea, which at Paris I had forgotten. It had a low roar, a solemn voice which I understood, which called to me

as if it had something to say to me, sadly, reproachfully. I had my window open. A wholesome odor permeated my being; I breathed deeply and with unaccustomed ease. The tide was high, and at this equinoctial season it mounted far up on the land, so that some of the breakers even flung their foamy spray against my windows. But already I had no longer any fear of the sea; I loved it again as in other days. Then, meditating in my maiden chamber, in which nothing has been changed, it seemed to me that I conversed with it, Robert, about you.

"Do not be jealous. It was the sea, that frank, unaffected counsellor, the sea, with all that is vigorous, bold, true, and loyal in its exhalations, that inspired me to go down into my inner self. It has confessed me, rudely, perhaps, yet pityingly; and I have been greatly dismayed, dear friend.

"I saw our past life unfold itself before me, our two lives from the time when first I knew you. Oh! it was sweet, at first, believe me. My sensations of surprise, of absorption in yourself, of confidence, while you were recasting my education, which, I own, had left me very ignorant, returned to me. How tenderly I loved you and with what sincerity! But that sincerity did not suit you; little by little you accustomed me to subtle complications; you forced me to make a clean sweep of everything that I respected (somewhat naively), to disdain a happy reality, to taste of imaginary torments. I do not deny that I have very often, almost always, found pleasure in them: my weakness has demonstrated it. You had fashioned for me a new soul with your own hand. That soul, which was your work, obeyed you; only, like all things that are of human device, it wore itself out; it wore itself out all the more quickly that you exacted a great deal of it.

"Ah! I have learned many things of you! I know too many of them now and they are my undoing! You desired in your wife a docile slave; I have been that slave. You wished to blend fantasy with love: I think that in that di-

rection, and in pursuance of your lessons, I have done all that lay in my power. You taught me to create an artificial world, with pleasures more artistic, beside which the reality is, in your estimation, but flat—if it affords but an ordinary pleasure. You have led me through visions of that which is forbidden, of fear, of mysticism, even, and you have taught me that falsehood is divine. I have followed you; but now we are in the distracting situation of the hashish-eater who has used too much of the perturbing drug: it no longer produces dreams, it nauseates.

“The sea still spoke to me and I let it talk. For what it said was truth, and it was at once sad and sweet. I have very quickly become provincial again, have I not? and the little grain of the ideal which I thought was destroyed has soon sprung up in the solitude of my native heath. You must forgive me, Robert. You did wrong to leave me to myself.

“Do you know what the sea said further? It suggested to me that nothing in this world could take the place of simple love, and that, since those who have gone before us contented themselves with such love, we also could put up with it without being ridiculous. And now, this is what I believe: that marriage, even as I had pictured it, is not at all a continual pursuit of clever emotions, nor encounters with Jenny Bracelets and the rest. The guide, the friend, the support, the much-cherished husband, you have replaced by a professor, who is often amusing, certainly, in sentimental virtuosity. But that cannot be practised without a very great weariness overtaking you some day.

“That hour has come for me, Robert; my strength has failed me; I am distracted by the great void between us, which leaves me too many intoxicating memories, inflaming the mind, but with which the heart has had decidedly too little to do. Hours of fever are all that I can recall, and I am in great need of repose. You have caused me to live too fast. You see, a little tenderness is needful, as well as passion.

“You do not think that I am much to be pitied. I am, nevertheless. Other women may have their disappointments, and I think there are very few who do not suffer from them; but at the worst, they have the right to evoke one instant, were it unique, in which their soul has blended in perfect union with another. For me, my greatest joys have been disquieting joys. It is not I whom you have loved, and the fact is somewhat humiliating : it is the creature within me whom you have invented. Why have I never been able to resist you? You are too redoubtable a magician for one who has remained as simple-minded as I have, and who would be loved for herself alone.

“Right here you will smile, perhaps, with some little contempt. Just now, before writing you this letter, in which (you need not fear) you will not find any traces of tears, as in letters which are read on the stage—I have suddenly become very proud, so proud as to hide from you the sort of despondency into which the proof of my unhappiness has thrown me—just now I was present at one of our ceremonies of betrothal. Pasq took me to see the promised couple, so as to divert my mind. She is a good creature, a good faithful dog—but you cannot appreciate such merits as these. I looked, then, upon a large, red-faced young woman, who gave her hand to a very ugly fellow, uglier than she. What is in store for her? Her husband will beat her when he is in liquor, or he will go a long way off, rough Breton sailor that he is, and she will become a widow at an early day, perhaps. Well, Robert, can you believe it? I envied her! She certainly has not many ideas, but she believes, at least. I no longer believe—there it is. You have killed the faith that was in me.

“Will faith return, Robert? Will that sublime thing spring up again within our wretched hearts, which lose of themselves enough of their illusions without needing any help? But at this hour I fear everything; I fear you most of all. When this letter shall have been entrusted to the postman,

who is about to pass this way before returning to Vannes, I also shall have departed. I shall go to quite a distance, I warn you, for fear of losing courage and sending for you. I must form a new nature unto myself, all alone, really much less complex than that which you have given me. And this is why I shall not write to you further. I am going to compose myself, to try to forget everything that you have taught me. I have told you, I am very tired ; I am bruised in spirit. The rest let us leave to time. Go and talk a little with the sea, you also ; it is a great friend. It will teach you at last, as it has me, that there is nothing better, perhaps, than the real.

"Ah, my poor Robert, we should have listened to the advice of Jenny Bracelet, when, with a spark of emotion due to the champagne, she adjured us to renounce this folly ! Do you know that she was the only person who had any good sense on that occasion ? Do you know also, that she was at that moment better than either of us ? For an instant, she was ashamed of herself, the poor girl, in my presence. A very appreciable person is your Jenny Bracelet.

"Farewell, dear friend. Decidedly, the heart should have a greater share in love than the brain. Farewell, or good-bye, if you will. Till when ?—I cannot tell ! Your

"MARIE-ANGE."

7.2











AUG 5 1959

